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MIRIAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE CRY AT MIDNIGHT.

"TWELVE o'clock! I did not think it was so late!"

The speaker collected several closely-written sheets of paper, and laid them away in a portfolio, piled half a dozen books of various sizes upon this, and pushed the heap to the other side of the table; then, with a shiver of self-congratulatory comfort, settled himself anew in his study-chair.

It was evident that some impulse of conscience or freak of inclination, and not weariness of mind or body, had assigned midnight as the outermost limit of study hours. There was enough unexpired energy in expression and movement to have borne him successfully much farther into the night. It was not a handsome face that now looked into the scarlet depths of the fire, as intently as it had explored the heavy tomes redolent with academic mustiness, yet it was a marked and by no means an unattractive one. Nature had, seemingly, formed it in a fitful mood. In bold disregard of the prime law of beauty, she had made angles where there should have been curves in its outlines—a fault whose effect was heightened by ill health or excess of mental labor. There were hollows in the pale cheeks and temples, from which the long locks were thrown back, and the firmness and strength indicated by the lower features were deepened by like causes into an air of stern resolution, only redeemed from grimness by the eyes. These were dark blue in color,

and singularly pleasant; large, well-formed, changeful in light and language, and heavily fringed. Lashes, brows, and hair were of that rare hue for which we have never devised a better name than "pale-brown"—an example of descriptive clumsiness worthy of the vernacular of an island, where the air is opaque for three-quarters of the year, and its inhabitants, perforce, partially color-blind. In the chestnut groves of sunny France, the quick eye of the native catches the radiant ripple following the wave of tresses whose tint is sober in the shade, and the alert tongue fashions the appropriate epithet—"*chataigne dorée.*"

There was a nameless something in the flow and lustre of the rich masses, falling to the collar of the student's gown, that suggested the image of taper fingers threading and scattering the gold drawn out brightly by the lamp-light; the thought of a mother's touch and blessing; a sister's playful caress; a bride's timid kiss upon their silken profusion. Nor was this idea of womanly ministrations easily dismissed, when once admitted. The tenant of this small quadrangle of the college buildings was not a Sybarite in physiognomy or occupation. There was indeed genuine enjoyment of inward ease and external comfort in his smile and the rub of his hands, as the sleet dashed against his window, and the old elm nearest the wall croaked hoarsely under its icy coat-of-mail, and the grate gave back a ruddy gleam to his look of satisfaction. Still it was not likely, if one might judge from his countenance and air, that he had bethought himself to select the shawl-pattern of his dressing-gown, or that its lining was thickly wadded and the blue silk facings elaborately quilted by his directions. A pair of slippers is an indispensable requisite of a literary man's wardrobe, but most of our young gentleman's mates wore plain cloth or plainer morocco, or, homeliest of all, wash-leather —while the pedal extremities supported by his fender were

encased in the softest, warmest, gayest combination which Berlin wool, canvas, and silk could form. On the table was a silver inkstand, and beside it a gorgeous pen-wiper—a bit of foppery which the owner excused to his inquisitive visitors by representing that they were keepsakes from his mother and sister, and that the bright rug, chintz chair-cover, and change of white curtains for his solitary window, were so many tokens of thoughtful affection from the same source. Doubtless one or the other of this solicitous pair also forwarded the small but dumpy envelope the son and brother now drew from his pocket for a reperusal, for the cover bore the address, "Mr. Neale C. Thorne, —— College," in a lady's writing.

He read it through lingeringly, refolded it, and still holding it in his hand, resumed his study of the glowing coals, a softer ray in his eye, and a faint smile playing about his mouth. He looked like what he was—an earnest thinker, a resolute worker, a large-hearted man, happy in the consciousness that he was loved and appreciated by those dearest to him. The wind howled, the sleet rattled sharply against the pane, and, mingled with the gentle sough of the heated draught in the chimney, was that most soothing of indoor sounds upon a wintry night, the regular dying hiss of the stray drops that found their way down the flue to the red bed in the grate.

The stillness that reigned throughout the long corridor and double range of rooms was so profound, and the dreamer had wandered so far away from the actual scene in his musings, that the slightest noise disconnected with those which lulled him into reverie, would have been a startling interruption. It was not, therefore, a proof of a vitiated state of the nervous system, that he absolutely sprang from his seat at a sound like the dull, heavy fall of some object in the adjoining room. For an instant he stood erect, grasp-

ing the back of his chair, his eyes dilated and ears attent for what might follow the mysterious disturbance. Only the piercing wail of the wind sobbing out its woes in the ear of the black midnight, and the faster, keener tapping of the sleet on the casement; no visible motion, save the slight billowing of the curtain, as the breath of the tempest penetrated between the joints of the sash.

He laughed a little as he sat down, and passing his hand over his forehead found that it gathered cold beads of sweat.

"I suppose this is what people call nervousness!" he muttered. "I have experienced more pleasant sensations! But what could that have been? Pshaw! probably Hosmer has knocked over his chair—or table—a chair would not have made so much noise. And, now I think of it, there was no crash—it was a queer, muffled fall."

He listened again. Still, for a while, only the storm without and the sighing song of the fire within. But there grew upon the watcher a sense of something awful in the silence of the dormitory. In this vague uneasiness he spoke half aloud, as before. His ears ached for the sound of human voice.

"If it were any other room I would knock and inquire into the matter; but that Hosmer is such an obstinately unsocial fellow! He would, most likely, send me back with the information that it was none of my business."

This was not altogether just to his neighbor—neighbor only in locality though he was—and his conscience pricked him for the speech so soon as it was uttered. Hosmer *was* unsocial, and obstinate in his non-reciprocation of such of the "small, sweet courtesies" of student-life, as his critic had sought opportunity to tender. But in this chilling reserve and seclusion was comprised the extent of his incivility. When forced by their frequent encounters in the pas-

sages and lecture-rooms to speak, his acknowledgment of the salutation he received was neither haughty nor boorish. He had the unmistakable stamp of a gentleman upon face, figure, and gesture. Yet he never met with his fellows in the mess-hall or literary societies; never participated in their gymnastic exercises or social gatherings. He walked alone, studied alone, and would have recited alone, if he could. These recitations were the only thing that saved him from utter contempt. They were literally and invariably faultless, as no man knew better than the classmate who roomed next to him. They were now near the middle of their senior year, and it was whispered sagely through the class that the hottest, most desperate race for the first honor, would be between the most beloved and the least popular man of their number. If the one were successful, smiles and cheers would hail him victor; if the other, there was not a person in the college or town, unless it was his generous rival, who would give him his hand with a phrase of sympathy and congratulation. Nobody thought to inquire where he boarded, or whence he had come to the institution—the gossips of the vicinage being too busy with matters of moment to investigate so uninteresting a subject. His room was a hermitage, whose recesses were never invaded by vagrant or curious foot, and there he sat day and night, studying, until thought ploughed furrows in forehead and cheek, ineffaceable as the wrinkles of age; delving, until the locks upon his sunken temples were grizzled, as if the toiling, fevered brain had drawn the sap from their roots; studying, delving, plodding with a miser's greed, until the young shoulders were bowed and the eyes had an eager famished look, and the lean fingers clutched, rather than held, book, paper, and pen, as the money-hoarder scrapes together the shining dust of his idolatry.

"Suicide! nothing less!" soliloquised Thorne, regretfully.

"What short-sighted ambition to expend all of one's strength in the mere preparation for Life's real work! Yet I cannot but respect the poor fellow's unflinching courage, his steady perseverance—misguided as it is."

Another silence. The curtain had a ghostly look, as it slowly rose and fell in the blast, and there were hollow murmurs, and strange echoes, like the suppressed voices and stealthy steps of unearthly creatures, along the corridors. Tramp! tramp! they filed with muffled tread by the watcher's door, as he held his breath to listen. He threw off the spell almost angrily.

"What contemptible nonsense is this? I shall begin to believe that I have nerves after all. Superstitious imaginations too! Come! we will see whether this is the effect of coal-gas, or an unhealthy action of the blood!"

He stepped out into the corridor and shut his door behind him. It was bitter cold, and the darkness was such as might be felt. Thorne folded his dressing-gown over his chest, and groped his way through the thick blackness to the door of his neighbor's room. The stillness of death reigned within. No gleam of light penetrated the keyhole or glanced from under the door.

"Can it be possible that the man has no fire?"

He remembered, with a pang very like remorse, how accustomed his ear had become to the short, dry cough that had sounded from the other side of the partition-wall all the winter—so accustomed, that he had ceased to remark it and feel uneasy thereat, of late.

"How selfish we become in this engrossing, toilsome life!"

He knocked gently at the door; then more loudly—twice—thrice. A long, shuddering sigh swept down the passage, and the flesh, not the spirit recoiled, as if the trail of flowing garments had touched him as they rustled past. He tried the lock. It yielded, and he pushed open the door.

"Hosmer!"

Darkness, icy and intense as that which filled the fireless halls, reigned within the chamber, and stillness, that sent a thrill to his heart. He rushed to his own room, caught up the lamp, and was back in an instant.

An empty grate; a table littered with books; one chair; a pine cupboard; a mean bed, unoccupied, and upon the bare floor, midway between it and the table, a motionless figure, lying face downward, one arm and leg bent under him, as though he had fallen in a heap, and not stirred afterward! With a strength that belied his delicate appearance and slender limbs, Thorne raised the body, and bore it to his apartment; laid it upon his bed, and strove, by friction and restoratives, to bring back vitality. He was loath to summon assistance, if it could be avoided; a nice instinct assuring him that the recluse could experience no more severe mortification than to awake to a consciousness that he was the object of curiosity and pity to a crowd. His hands and face were cold as frozen clay, and almost fleshless in their extreme emaciation. The eyes were sunken into caverns, and his complexion was cadaverous as that of one long dead.

One by one, these alarming circumstances forced themselves upon the notice of the busy and excited attendant. He could detect no motion of heart or pulse, no breath from the livid lips, and as minute after minute went by, and the ghastly symptoms were heightened, rather than diminished, his stout spirit was shaken. Wrapping the hot blankets around the patient's form, he walked, with a rapid step, down the hall, to the room of a classmate, whose discretion he could trust, and aroused him.

"Hosmer is very ill in my room!" he said. "Come and stay with him, while I run for the doctor. Be quick and quiet!"

By the time he had drawn on his great-coat and boots, his friend joined him, and after instructing him how to apply the means of resuscitation he had been using, Thorne promised to send him help, and ran down-stairs. He made one pause upon the next floor, at the door of a young medical student, who readily engaged to take his place above until his return. Then he unbarred the great leaves of the outer entrance, and plunged into the storm. The physician's residence was not far away, and he was, fortunately, at home. Without waiting for his company, the dauntless Samaritan fought his way back, now in the teeth of the tempest—a gale so violent and sleet so cutting, that, notwithstanding his impatience, he was forced, several times, to turn around, with his face in the direction from which he had come, to recover his breath.

"Could a departing soul make its way, through this strife of elements, from earth to heaven?" was the involuntary thought as he beheld the welcome square of light in the huge, formless mass of the college wall.

A few minutes more, and he stood, breathless, the frosted rain clinging to his clothes and hair, by the side of his co-workers in the labor of charity.

"It is useless! I thought so from the first!" said the medical student, dropping the hand he had been rubbing with hot spirits.

"What do you mean?" asked Thorne, his face blanching.

"I mean that the poor fellow has gone!"

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure!"

None of the three moved or spoke again, until the light of a lantern flashed out in the passage, and the doctor's step was heard stumbling upon the stairs. Thorne went to meet him, hastily expressed his fear that his visit would be of no avail, and brought him to the bedside. The students,

by his directions, moved, but very tenderly, the poor, wasted limbs, and loosened the threadbare garments that hid the heart, now stilled—was it forever?

Thorne's eyes asked this question of the physician, when the examination was concluded.

"It is, indeed, all over, sir! I can do nothing except endeavor to determine what was the cause of his death."

While the other two went to procure such assistance as was now needful, the doctor and Thorne, at the desire of the former, made an inspection of the adjoining dormitory. The lower part of the cupboard had apparently once contained wood, for there were still in the remote recesses a fragment or two of bark and woody dust, but there remained, besides these tokens of its former use, not a chip or a splinter. The upper compartment held a cup and plate; a small frying-pan and a tea-kettle, both much worn, and an old covered basket, which Thorne identified as one he had often seen Hosmer carrying up and down the stairs. These few utensils were clean and bare, and there was nothing else in the cupboard. A shabby cloak hung against the wall, and there was but one thin blanket and a coarse sheet upon the bed. A trunk in the corner was partially filled with ragged underclothing; there were some volumes—text-books, classical works, and a Bible upon the table, and in a rusty portfolio, a number of letters and written fragments, upon which the physician instantly fastened eyes and fingers.

"You will please take possession of this portfolio, Mr. Thorne, since, as I understood you to say, the deceased had no nearer friend here. There may be papers among those that will afford a clue, not only to his relations or connections, but to the causes of his untimely end."

"You do not suppose that he committed——."

Thorne could not bring himself to utter the word he had applied coolly to his classmate only an hour before.

"Not intentional suicide, certainly! But from what you have related of his character and habits, and what I have myself seen here, there is no doubt in my mind, that, while there may have existed other and proximate causes of dissolution—perhaps in diseased lungs and heart—the actual and immediate occasion of his death was inanition, increased by cold—but starvation, in fact."

"*Starvation*—did you say, sir?"

"Starvation!"

Thorne sat down upon the bed, weak and stunned by the shock.

"It is a lamentable occurrence, Mr. Thorne! I do not wonder at your emotion. The event is one which every friend of humanity and this institution must deeply deplore. Ah! I hear the President outside. I must consult with him forthwith with regard to the post-mortem and the coroner's inquest. I depend upon you, sir, to see that this room is kept locked, and in its present state, until these are held."

He went out, and the young man knelt by the hard couch, and wept as for a brother.

Oh! it was terrible, *terrible*, to think of the life of suffering that had been going on within these walls, while he, separated from it by a frail boundary, scarcely a span in width, had wrought out the same intellectual tasks in ease, and even luxurious comfort! Proud as he was in his own independent spirit, Thorne could hardly comprehend the might of that will, the height of that pride, that could behold Death, inch by inch, invade the vitals, and give no sign of pain. He remembered now that he had not seen Hosmer in the lecture-rooms, or elsewhere, for two days. How had he spent them? in what agonizing conflict? in what sullen despair? in what vain longings for the human aid and sympathy he yet could not humble himself to ask?

in what stoical resistance to the pangs of expiring, outraged Nature, until he fell, dumbly defiant to the last?

"If I had known! if I had only known!"

Vain, bitter cry! most vain, most bitter of all lamentations, when its wormwood and gall are tasted after the gate of death has hidden from us forever the one we have pained, or neglected, or undervalued. Oh! by the memory of the unspeakable anguish of that self-reproachful stab, from which fresh blood wells still at the memory of our departed ones; the mingling of sable with the white immortelles we would hang, pure, unspotted above their graves—let us deal gently with the living who are still spared to our sad hearts!

The half-hour in that desolate chamber was a teacher whose lessons went with Neale Thorne down to life's latest day. Whatever might have been the precepts which the living lips of its late occupant would have spoken to his classmate and visitor,—being dead, he preached of charity, watchful and instant, in season and out of season; of self-forgetful brotherhood; of fleeting Time and irrevocable Eternity.

CHAPTER II.

JAMES HOSMER.

The verdict at the inquest sustained the physician's opinion as to the manner in which the deceased came to his death, and the papers in the portfolio bore correlative testimony to the condition of the body and the state of things in his room. The documents were restored to Neale Thorne by the Faculty of the college and accompanied the request that he would examine and compare them carefully with one another, for the purpose of discovering, if possible, something concerning the family and friends of the unhappy youth.

It was incredible, said everybody, that a student should have attended lectures in this celebrated institution, for nearly two years and his antecedents remain utterly unknown to professors, classmates and townspeople. But the world is full of incredibilities, and this theory, tenable as it was proved to be by argument, was positively contradicted by facts. No information was substantiated relative to James Hosmer, beyond the circumstances of his thorough and admirable examination preparatory to his enrolment in the junior class; the punctual payment of his fees; his marvellous scholarship, and his daily life of monkish seclusion. There were shopmen, who testified to his having bought provisions of various, always of the cheaper kinds, from them ever since his residence in the place, and from their evidence was deduced a corroboration of the examining physician's

statement, that weeks, perhaps months, had elapsed since he had partaken of animal food. His instructors were unanimous in their praises of his application to study and correct deportment, and his fellow-students, while acknowledging that his reserved habits rendered him unpopular amongst them, were prompt in bearing witness to his peaceful, quiet habits. They were all shocked, many pained, at his sudden and melancholy end, and speculation was rife with regard to the reasons of his singular reticence respecting his previous history and his personal necessities. His private papers were few in number, and, it would seem, had been sedulously weeded of whatever could throw any light upon his parentage or birth-place. Abstracts of lectures, chronological memoranda, theses in different languages, ably written, loose sheets of figures to which the key was wanting, etc., were all that appeared in his handwriting, except an unfinished letter, dated three days before his death, and without address.

It was over this that Thorne pondered longest and most sadly, on the night after the death and inquest. His room was warm and cheerful, as upon the preceding evening, but his countenance and bearing had undergone a great change. The ghastly burden no longer lay upon his bed, but his features wore still some reflection of the awful shadow that had wrapped those of the dead man, like a veil. He could not lose the impressions of that midnight alarm, or forget, that as a man, he had overlooked, through mistaken delicacy, the mortal extremity of a human being; as a Christian, had suffered a soul to pass from his very side into the dread world of judgment, without having ever spoken to it a word of counsel, of encouragement, of warning.

These were the contents of the paper he held:

"——— College, *January* 16*th*, 18—.

"This letter will disappoint, it may be, anger you. The end has come at last, and you must know it. Your last letter came to hand three days since, and I have shrunk like a coward from writing this reply. I have nothing more to give you: nothing for myself—not a cent in the world! I tell you this that you may know to what strait I am reduced before I can say, I can do no more for you!

"When I entered this college, two years since—a disgraced, yet an innocent man—I had what I supposed would pay my expenses here and leave me enough for a modest support afterward, until I could enter upon the practice of the profession I had chosen. Economical I have been from the first, for I felt that every dollar saved from my personal expenditures was so much toward my establishment in the new life to which I looked forward. Then came the statement of your distressed condition and the subsequent applications. I responded to them to the utmost of my ability, and became more rigid in my self-denial—retrenched my already meagre supplies. Last vacation, I peddled books through a distant state, under an assumed name. Upon my return to college, I found another letter from you, and sent you all of the pitiful salary I had gained in this humble calling. For eight weeks I have lived upon bread and water—my allowance, one small loaf *per diem*. Yet you reproach me for the paltry sums I forward! You say in your last letter—which I have burned, as I had done most of the others—a second reading would have crazed me! you assert that I have grown ungrateful since I 'have become a gentleman and you a pauper;' that my 'memory is treacherous, in my prosperity, of past benefits and old friends.' But for those keen words, I would never have revealed to you the truth, that three-fourths—yes, four-fifths of my worldly all has gone to you. Why will you persist

in your disbelief of my statement of the amount of the bequest, which is all I have, or rather *had?* For one it was at best but a moderate competence; it has failed to supply the wants of two. What now lies before me, the Father, who is my sole trust, only knows. As long as there remained even a remote hope of reaching the goal I set before me in those far-off days of boyhood, I struggled onward. I *feel* that I should not have failed but for———

"Since writing the above, I have had several strange attacks of faintness, produced, I imagine, by weakness and an imperfect circulation of the blood. Sometimes the thought comes over me—'What if I were to die, without justifying myself in the sight of those I love and honor!—die, without a friend near me!—without a name! Hardest of all, die, without seeing *her* again!' Friend! brother! I charge you by the dear memories of our Past———"

Here the irregular characters ceased. The impassioned appeal of the proud, faithful, wronged heart was arrested until the last great Day, that shall try the secrets of all souls.

Laying it aside, at length, Thorne searched among the other papers for some indication of the address to which this epistle was designed to be sent. The most plausible clue was a letter post-marked "Mobile, Ala.," and bearing a date a year old.

"My Dear Boy:—I am in hiding here, for the lack of money to pay my board bill. My clothes are pawned; my person liable to arrest. There is no one upon the broad earth to whom I can look except yourself—my best, oldest, dearest friend! When you desert me, 'Poins,' I shall drown myself in good earnest. I would cut my throat now, but have sold my razor this morning to get me a loaf

of bread. I cannot express to you what I have undergone, rather than trouble you again with a 'begging letter.' Yet I know that my repugnance to becoming your pensioner does you injustice; feel that were I in your place—a man of independent means, and you the disinherited, friendless, penniless rascal that now addresses you, my heart and purse would be alike open to you. When I think of old times, and then my miserable present, I am mad—desperate—wretched beyond comparison. If you can throw me a plank, you may save a soul. If you cannot, take my blessing, and remember that I am in death, what I have been through life,

"Yours most faithfully."

An unintelligible cipher formed the signature, and beneath was written: "Direct, until further notice, to 'Henry H. Austin, Mobile.' By the way, I met a man, a week or two since, who had recently visited the old place. He did not know me, so I questioned him pretty thoroughly. The governor was well and prosperous as ever—not inconsolable for my loss as you may imagine—ditto the rest of the family. I mention no names; but one member of it was alluded to as being in fine health and looks. How soon I am forgotten by all but you, old fellow! You have something to live for—I nothing!"

There was no other letter from the same person in the little collection, and, what struck Thorne as singular, not another which retained its envelope. The dates of all the rest were several years old, and being family epistles, were not inscribed with the name of the town or state wherein they were written. Half-a-dozen were from a sister, penned in an elegant hand and pleasing in style. There were repeated references to other members of the household, but always by some familiar or pet name. Of these,

one whose title occurred oftenest, the reader judged to be her husband.

"The Prince was out fox-hunting all of yesterday, and has a severe headache to-day." "The Prince joins me in affectionate regards and wishes for your return home."

"The Prince sends his love, and desires to know if you are overburdened by university honors. He wonders whether the bird of Liberty will have a pinion left after you have handled him upon the glorious Fourth. I should so like to hear your oration, and so would a bright-eyed lassie, who shall be nameless."

"Ha!" said Thorne, as he reached this, "If I could find out what university, the catalogue of that year would aid me materially."

But he looked in vain for any hint bearing upon this point. Another letter, headed, "Written with baby on my lap," spoke of failing health and increase of care on the part of the writer, and closed with this paragraph:

"I do not wish to alarm you—but if your letters from this place contain any unpleasant rumors—any news, that surprises and excites you, make no reply to them until you confer with me. Above all, not a word to my husband! Direct to me, under cover to our 'Sunbeam,' and ask her to deliver the letter when the Prince is not by. By the way, she has just come in, and taken baby from my knees. I wish I could sketch her for you, as she sits in that low chair, singing the darling to sleep. I ask her what message I shall send from her. She blushes bewitchingly and says, *very* indifferently, 'Oh, whatever you like!' A *carte blanche* I forward to you to fill up. Blessed is he who shall win this Sunbeam to his heart and home! One of my fondest hopes is that I shall live to see you two united. You deserve her, dear brother. I could not say as much for any

other man I know, and I feel that your love and constancy will be rewarded. I am glad you liked the picture. We thought the likeness good, although it hardly does her justice. Heigho! I cannot write cheerfully to-day. I have a presentiment of coming evil. Pray God it may be false!

"Your loving Sister."

This was the latest in the series, having been written two years and a half before. In an inner pocket of the portfolio there had been found at the inquest a bulky envelope, closely sealed, and inscribed—"*To be burned, unopened.*" This, Thorne had refused to relinquish to the keeping of any other person. It spoke well for the delicacy and kind feeling of the jurors that but one man offered a protest against the literal and immediate execution of this, the only will and testament of the deceased. Thorne had himself made a pit in the midst of the burning coals, in the grate, dropped in the sacred deposit, and covered it quickly, lest a line or word should start into view during its demolition. His youthful imagination surmised, after reading the sister's letters, that those burned were from the "Sunbeam," therein mentioned, whose rays flickered before the dying eyes, quickened into passionate flow the last pulses of the thin, spent blood. Where was she now? Would she watch for his coming—his hard-won laurels thick upon his brow—to claim from her the more abundant reward of his toil; to forget in her love the privations he had borne so gallantly? Thorne marvelled no more at the superhuman fortitude with which labor and suffering had been supported. His heart made answer, from its depths, that with such incentives to urge him on—with such a guerdon in sight, a man could do and brave any thing of hardship and danger—might even dare to die.

"Ah!" he sighed mournfully, "long must those eyes

await his return, until hope sickens into despair! Will she think him ill—dead—inconstant?"

There was a rap at the door, and the friend first summoned by him upon the previous night, came in. He was a grave, judicious man, several years Thorne's senior, but the intimacy between the two was close and strong, notwithstanding the disparity of age and disposition.

"I am glad to find you alone at last!" he said. "To tell the truth, there has been more publicity given to the minutiæ of this unfortunate affair than suits my taste and feelings. The morbid curiosity now manifested by those who never gave Hosmer a look or thought when he was alive, is really sickening. I commended your resolution not to have the seal of that packet broken this morning. I have watched ever since for an opportunity to place in your hands this, which I found last night while we were changing his clothing, in the pocket of the vest, whose tatters they were turning to the light and to staring gazers to-day."

It was a locket, the morocco case rubbed and defaced by frequent handling. Within was a curl of long dark hair, tied with a faded scarlet ribbon, and the daguerreotype of a young girl, apparently about seventeen; a bright, arch face, but not beautiful; the eyes at once searching and laughing, the whole visage indicative of character and intelligence. The jealous worship of its late owner would have suffered no shock at the looks of reverent interest that inspected his treasure. Thorne gave one long gaze at the face, satisfied himself that the case did not bear the artist's name or address, gently replaced the hair, and clasped the spring.

"No other eye shall see it! It was kind and considerate in you, Mervill, to secrete it and bring it to me. Since Providence seems to have appointed me the poor fellow's executor, I shall exercise my discretion in this matter. The

picture shall rest in death, where it did in life—upon the heart that cherished the original so faithfully. Will you go with me into the other room?"

He took a key from the table.

"Another part of my errand in here, was to solicit the privilege of sharing your vigil," said Mervill. "You should not have insisted upon watching here alone. You look unfit for the task after the labor and excitement of last night. There were others who would willingly have sat up in your stead."

"Yes! and told jokes, smoked cigars—perhaps played whist, to pass time and keep up their spirits! I accept your offer as promptly as I have refused all others. Like yourself, I am weary of publicity. Every question, every speculation, every trite comment, jars upon my feelings. I am heart-sore and heart-sick! The tragedy, in its most meagre details, is fearful enough. The thought of death from want and hardship among strangers, this starvation in the midst of plenty is too dreadful, without the revolting accompaniments of greedily curious eyes spying out the poverty the man died rather than reveal, and coarse, careless remarks upon such relics as that sad, sad letter which Dr. Jones read to-day to the gaping jurors. I cannot endure the idea of further gossip and irreverent handling of the remains or history of such a man as I know Hosmer to have been!"

He unlocked the door of the room, now so sadly tenanted. There were candles upon the table, from which the books had been removed, and a white cloth was spread smoothly over it. The clothing and trunk were gone; a white curtain hid the window, and a spotless sheet covered the bed, sweeping down to the floor. Through it, were traceable the stiff outlines, that, once seen, can never be forgotten. Thorne shut the door softly, and turned down the sheet.

The look of suffering had passed from the wasted features, and in its place was the half-smile of perfect repose, of sure and endless peace, that often settles upon the faces of the dead; perhaps the light of the last triumphant glance cast by the freed soul upon its late companion—God knoweth!

"What a brow!" whispered Mervill, pointing to the majestic proportions of the marble forehead.

"And what a heart!" thought his companion, as he replaced the locket within the vestments that clothed him for the grave. "His secret is safe!" he added, readjusting the covering; "I know that he would have had it so!"

The funeral was attended by the students in a body, and the customary badge of mourning—oh, mockery of mockeries!—worn by them upon the left arm for thirty days. Advertisements were inserted in Northern, Southern, and Western papers, for information respecting the friends of "James Hosmer, late a student in —— College." Thorne wrote to "Henry H. Austin," of Mobile, full particulars of the young man's death, together with a copy of the unfinished letter, inquiring whether the original epistle were meant for him, and if he—Mr. Austin—could supply the desired intelligence as to Hosmer's home and relatives. No answer came to public or private inquiries. The memoranda and letters remained uncalled-for in a locked drawer of Thorne's desk; the other part of the secret was sealed up deep with the dead youth, in his nameless grave.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW MINISTER.

THE air was resonant with the sweet, persuasive clamor of Sabbath bells. Not that there were many of them; for the pretty town of Limestone, although very comely in the eyes of strangers, and in those of its denizens the centre of Western civilization—a paradoxical phrase if taken in its geographical sense, the hub of a wheel not being, as a general thing, placed so near its verge as the gallant state in which the place was situate, neared slow-and-easy, cotton-growing South, and fast-and-anxious, manufacturing North—the thriving town of Limestone, I say, could boast of but six churches, and two of these were without belfries. The remaining four were more ambitious structures than their silent neighbors. Limestone had grown out of a village, and was hoping, at some not distant day, to be a city. It was handsomely laid out, with wide streets and spacious squares, and its stores, public buildings, and most of its private residences, were creditable to the taste and enterprise of its inhabitants. It had its West-end (who ever saw a hamlet that had not?)—and toward this quarter, by the inexplicable law of attraction that prevails universally and conspicuously in much more important places than this aspiring "burg," had been drawn the largest and finest houses of worship.

When I succeed in finding a publisher disinterested and complaisant enough to bring out my volume of lay-sermons, the reader will there see, under the head of "Discourses

upon Popular Fallacies," one from the text, "To the poor the gospel is preached," which, I predict, will be an immense favorite among the down-towners, and be sneered at as "a flimsy, flippant thing, just such a pretentious failure as might have been expected from a woman's pen!" by the pastors and people who live upon loftier ground and among streets of higher numbers.

Two out of the four steepled churches of Limestone seemed to have backed as far away from the river, and as high up the rise of the hills, as the prideful impetus of their respective corporations would carry them, and there been arrested by certain tough chains of democratic association with the older streets and houses below. The others, being untrammelled by such low tendencies, or arising superior to them, were planted boldly upon the summit of the central eminence of the range, sweeping broadly and greenly away into the fertile plateau of the back-country. The newer, and it was generally conceded, the more tasteful of these, was a neat Gothic edifice, substantial and commodious, standing about a dozen yards back from the street; a lawn, enclosed by an iron railing, in front; a lecture-room, with a pastor's study attached, in the rear; and in the tower above, a finely-toned bell, just now tolling its final summons to the worshippers whose will and duty it was to meet within this temple for prayer and praise.

The assembly was to-day unusually large. Scarcely a member of the communion or congregation was absent, and the throng was swelled by additions from other churches—the curious, and seekers after every novelty; for the new pastor was, this forenoon, to preach his first sermon since his installation. Many of the present audience had already heard him. About two months before, a committee was appointed by the then vacant church to hear a clergyman of some distinction, settled in a city more than a hundred miles

distant. By what the three Limestonians were, at the commencement of the exercises, disposed to regard as a stroke of ill-fortune, but construed into a wise Providence ere they were over, the distinguished gentleman was absent, and had engaged a young brother, fresh from his theological seminary, to act as his substitute at home. The triad of stranger-listeners held a conference between services, and resolved to attend the same church in the afternoon; another, after the second sermon, and determined to take the responsibility of inviting the youthful divine to supply their pulpit upon the succeeding Sabbath. He came to Limestone; preached twice, and went his way—to be followed, within a fortnight, by the call. This, the surprised licentiate, after due deliberation, and some correspondence with the legislative executive of the church, had accepted, and now presented himself among his flock, to assume his onerous duties.

The last straggler tiptoed up the aisle, with that conscious, apologetic air, on account of his tardiness and creaking boots, that overwhelms the boldest offender against sanctuary decorum, if his destined seat lie three pews beyond the friendly shelter of the gallery—and there was a profound hush of expectation. From the door at the right of the pulpit, communicating with the study, a tall figure issued, crossed the platform to the great chair behind the desk, and bowed his head in silent prayer. As this brief act of devotion was concluded, there went up a shout of glad music from the choir:

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, 'Thy GOD reigneth!'

"Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see, eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

"Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem! for the Lord hath comforted his people; he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

"The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our GOD!"

The last note died away, and the pastor arose and stood before the waiting assembly; stood in their sight, as he held them in his, for an instant, as if he would comprehend them in his thoughts as one people—*his* people—before he bore their united petitions to the mercy-seat of a common Father. A pale, intellectual face, the brow shaded by locks of golden brown; eyes deep and clear, now full of a solemn, religious light—these were all the gazers had had time to note, when he lifted his hand; and his voice, sonorous and sweet as an organ-tone, sounded to the farthest recess of the building—"Let us invoke the blessing of GOD!"

There were not a dozen sentences in this invocation. He spent neither time nor breath in hackneyed phrases of laudation of the names, titles, and attributes of the Being he addressed, "vain repetitions," that tend to degrade instead of honoring their object; too frequently recited, like an oft-conned formula, without which no prayer is, in the opinion of the formalist, a legitimate offering. He rejoiced in the name of those whose mouth-piece he was, that the GOD of Zion reigned, and that His chosen ones might sing together, even in earthly temples, of His might and goodness. He prayed that the strong right arm of the Holy one might guide, protect, and comfort all then in the Divine presence; that the watchman might be directed to declare aright good tidings of good unto the people, and they be comforted thereby. It was as though the matchless anthem had given the key-note for the rest of the service.

If it be true that the grand secret of oratorical power is

summed in that pithy oracle, "Earnestness is eloquence," then was Neale Thorne an eloquent man. Those who had admired the flexible intonations of his voice in reading, its reverence and pathos in prayer, were yet unprepared for its effect when he warmed with the theme of his discourse. As a man, he reasoned with rational, practical men; as a brother, he pleaded with brethren; as an ambassador of Christ, he spoke fearlessly the truth, not denying, or putting out of sight the terrors of the law, "if so be he might persuade some." But whatever the strain he employed, it was impossible to question his sincerity. It was because he himself realized so fully the verity of what he declared, that he pressed it home upon the mind and conscience of his hearers. His utterances were not the speech of an angel, wafted down from an unapproachable height of holiness—but the talk of a mortal—fallible, sinning, and through that sin a sufferer—with fellow-mortals, who sought a cure for the wounds inflicted by their transgressions.

It was a new style of preaching to the citizens of Limestone, and they heard it—if not gladly—with rapt attention. The bulk of the congregation retired quietly, and without unnecessary delay; but a few of the notables and officials tarried behind to be introduced; to offer thanks to the minister, and exchange sly felicitations among themselves. The elder, whose temporary guest Mr. Thorne was, acted as master of ceremonies.

"Mr. Fry!" he said, presenting a gentlemanly-looking personage.

The proper salutations were gone through with, and Mr. Fry remarked: "When you are disengaged, Mr. Thorne, Mrs. Fry is anxious to see you. And if you will forgive the robbery, Mr. Roberts"—to the elder—"we hope to retain Mr. Thorne as our guest until evening. Mrs. Fry claims him as an old friend."

Desirous of meeting any such, in this land of strangers, Mr. Thorne accompanied his new acquaintance to the vestibule of the church, where he was accosted by a little lady, with bright, black eyes, dancing curls, and a face fairly beaming with smiles.

"I am *so* glad to meet you!" she said, holding out her hand before he was within arm's length of her.

"Mrs. F—," began Mr. Fry.

"There! my dear! you needn't!" interrupted his wife. "Of course, Mr. Thorne knows whom you brought him here to see, and of course, I couldn't, after hearing him preach possibly mistake him for anybody else, and I think, for my part, that introductions are stupid ceremonies—horrid bores—even when necessary, when, for instance, Mr. Jones never heard of Miss Smith before, and Mrs. Robinson does not recognize Mr. Johnson. But the carriage is waiting, and I'm sure that you are tired to death, Mr. Thorne, and worried and perplexed moreover, by that interminable string of people thronging up to you, just, for all the world, as they did to the door of the menagerie, when the royal Bengal tiger was on exhibition here last year. And you are expected to remember every body, and call every one of them, man, woman, and child, by his or her proper cognomen, very promptly and distinctly, and ask after each absent member of the family, by name, too! And to keep an account of all the toothaches and headaches and rheumatisms that are confided to you, for sympathy, so that you can make suitable inquiries about them the next time you meet the afflicted of your flock, to say nothing of spiritual maladies—"

"My dear! Don't you think—"

"There, Hugh! I see you are going to scold! Have I said any thing very heterodox, Mr. Thorne?"

"Not according to my creed, madam," he rejoined, laughing.

They were in the carriage by this time, and rolling along toward the outskirts of the town. Before Mrs. Fry had reached her first comma—she never used a longer stop until she had talked herself entirely out of breath—Mr. Thorne was assured, by his excellent memory, that he had never seen or heard her before this meeting, and was puzzling his brain to determine whether he had misunderstood Mr. Fry's allusion to an ancient friendship, or, whether Mr. Fry had mistaken his wife, or, whether the lady were herself laboring under a hallucination. She granted him no opportunity for insinuating an inquiry.

"Then, you *have* a creed! I am delighted to hear that you profess to be the proprietor of that indispensable article of ecclesiastical furniture. It is eminently respectable to keep a creed—at least, so it is considered in our church. Now, I am a heretic in many minor matters of form and such-like things, and nothing but my husband's soundness of doctrine prevents sundry of our good people from making an *auto da fé* of me some fine Sunday. I was afraid, judging from your sermon, to-day, that you were too bold a thinker, not enough of a "blue law," to continue to satisfy these fathers of the faithful, and that we might lose you in consequence thereof."

"Fanny! perhaps—" interjected Mr. Fry, trying to look grave.

"My dear husband! I give you my word of honor, as a lady, that I had no intention of mentioning names. You must understand, Mr. Thorne, that I am a little—just a *little* disposed to be indiscreet. Not that I mean any thing by it—and my repentance after every lapse is truly agonizing—but genuine and thorough as it is, it does not undo the mischief I have done, any more than asking forgiveness does. I suppose I have begged more people's pardon than any other woman of my age in the country. If Bunyan's Val-

ley of Humiliation were a real locality, I would build a summer residence in its cool shades, and live there at least half of the year—repent of my sins of the tongue by wholesale. So, Mr. Fry would not let me invite you home to dinner, until I promised him solemnly to refrain from personal allusions, so far as it was possible for me to do so—above all things, not to say a word that could prejudice you against any one in the town or congregation. That was the engagement—wasn't it, Hugh?"

"It was, if I remember rightly."

"And I pledged my word—for I never knew until last night that you were from Maryland. We were informed that you were a Kentuckian."

"I am—madam—by birth. My parents did not remove from this state until I was twelve years old."

"You have sisters—have you not?"

"Yes, madam, three."

"Mary—Caroline—Gertrude! Am I right?"

"You are!" Thorne's face kindled with pleasurable emotion and surprise at hearing the familiar names.

"I told you so, my dear!" The little lady's eyes sparkled. "And did you never hear your sisters Carrie and Gertrude, speak of a madcap friend of theirs—one Fanny Wilde, better known as 'Wild Fanny,' who was at school with them in Baltimore for two sessions?"

"I certainly have." The reminiscence was evidently amusing, for he laughed as heartily as was consistent with politeness. "And you are—"

"'Wild Fanny' yet—your eyes say, although civility restrains your tongue. I have changed my name but not my nature. Gertrude was my best friend at school, little as we resemble one another. *You* look like her! We corresponded for several years, but I married and—did she?"

"She is still single. She has not forgotten you, for I re-

member now that she charged me to make inquiries in this region for her whilom schoolmate, whose married name had slipped her mind. Mary and Carrie are married; Gertrude has lived with Mary for the past year."

Mrs. Fry glanced at the mourning band upon his hat, and divined the meaning of the shade that crossed his features in uttering the last sentence. The quick moisture came up to her eyes, and she did not speak again until the carriage stopped before a pleasant house, distant about half a mile from the church. Then she said, with a pleasing mixture of vivacity and warmth:

"As the brother of my old friends, you must always be at home here, Mr. Thorne. When you are weary of wearing your clerical stilts, I invite you to lay them off at this gate."

"Thank you, madam! This stilting is a species of elevated promenade I have never tried, nor do I think I shall ever adopt the fashion; but your invitation is none the less welcome on that account."

The offered home was undoubtedly tempting, with its garden full of May flowers; its wide hall, through which the breeze wandered at its own sweet will from morn until eve; its roomy piazzas, furnished with benches and lounging chairs; and within doors, every appliance that a regard for comfort and intellectual enjoyment demanded. Mr. Fry was a man of refined tastes and studious habits. His library was his pet, while his wife divided her attention—she could have no cares—between her baby, her flowers, and her housekeeping. Dinner was served almost immediately, and the visitor was inwardly diverted by the droll salmagundi the hostess kept before him throughout the courses—a rattling flow of miscellaneous chat, as natural to her as breathing, spiced by hospitable exhortations, and varied by divers trips to the Valley of Humiliation. The first of these

excursions was undertaken by the time the blessing was said.

"I am positively shocked, Mr. Thorne—actually frightened, by a review of my conversation with, or rather *at* you, from our meeting in the church vestibule to the moment of our arrival here. It was very unbecoming in me to commence such a frivolous rigmarole, right under the droppings of the sanctuary, as one may say. If I displeased you I beg your pardon."

"There is no apology due to me, my dear madam. I know of no law that forbids a smile and a cheerful greeting when friends meet, even in the church porch. On the contrary, I am disposed to believe that we oftener commit an error, if not a sin, in wearing a sorrowful, than a merry face. In these respects, as in numberless others, there can be no fixed rules of deportment. Common sense is the best arbiter."

"A kind of sense that must be much more common than it is in this age, before you win many converts to your opinion," returned the lady. "Take some of that currant-jelly with your lamb—do! The ogres of my childish days were classified after this manner: Awful—church members on sabbath-days; from Monday morning until Saturday night they were comparatively harmless. More awful—elders, especially those who read through their noses, and had a trick of pushing up their spectacles to make 'a few practical remarks' when the chapter was done; and they found more terrible passages, full of woes and threatenings, in their Bibles than I ever could in mine. Let me give you some of the asparagus! No? some of the green-peas, then! —you are eating nothing! *Most* awful—our minister! We had old Mr. Rowley then—"

"Fanny! take care!"

"Where's the harm, my dear, of talking of one who de-

parted this life twenty years ago? I never shall forget how I wondered at the tears shed over him, by the people he had preached to sleep every Sunday for fifteen years. He had been abusing this wicked world all his days, 'sighing from this body of sin to be free' "—

"My dear wife!"

"He had, Hugh! I have heard him groan it out a hundred times, and how 'vanity of vanities' was stamped upon every thing earthly, and all that kind of cant. I thought then—I was a silly child—remember! that it was very wrong and selfish in his friends to mourn his departure. I suggested some such item of comfort to my mother, who was heartily distressed at his death, and had my ears boxed for my pert, unfeeling speech. John! pass the bread to Mr. Thorne! I mean no disrespect to the ministry, Hugh. Mr. Thorne knows me too well to suspect me of such injustice and irreverence. It is the noblest calling upon earth—only, I wish there were certain modifications introduced into the practice of some of those who follow it, so that children and young people need not grow up with the fixed idea that preachers are their natural enemies."

"If such be the case, there is assuredly urgent need of reform, on one side or the other," observed Mr. Thorne, smiling. "I should be disheartened were I forced to the belief that the very uncomfortable persuasion you deprecate is universal."

"Now I *have* said something outrageous!" exclaimed Mrs. Fry. "I have not seen my husband look so reproachful in a year. I will not speak another word for five minutes!"

During this time, which she was supposed to spend in the gloomy depths of the valley aforesaid, Mr. Fry and the visitor conversed upon topics relating to the town and church. Mr. Thorne had many inquiries to make, and he

found, in his host, a sensible, prudent reference for the information he required.

"You are fortunate in your selection of a home," remarked Mr. Fry. "I was fearful that you might seek quarters in some one of our half-dozen boarding-houses, instead. These are well-kept, I believe, but are, still, for many reasons, undesirable residences for one of your age and position."

"So I imagined. Yet I can hardly say that I selected my abiding-place. Mr. Roberts wrote to me that arrangements could be made for my accommodation in a hotel, or in one of the establishments you have mentioned, or in a private family, on the borders of the town. Two of these plans, I dismissed incontinently, and there remained but the third. To this, the principal objection, in Mr. Roberts' eyes, was a prime recommendation in mine—namely, its distance from my study. A walk of that length is part of my daily practice, in all weathers."

Mrs. Fry, here, to use a boxer's phrase, "came up to time."

"You know Dr. Stanton—do you not?"

"He was one of the committee, whose invitation brought me to this church, and he called upon me last evening, in company with his daughter, Mrs. Hartley."

"There is his house!" said the lady, pointing through the window. "That fine old place on the hill, with the grove behind it. It is a country-seat, you perceive, and more than a Sabbath day's journey from the church; but you will have a charming home. Mrs. Hartley is gentle and motherly, and the best housekeeper for miles around. That walnut catsup is a present from her. Do try it! I am no gourmande; but I never entertain such charitable sentiments toward epicures as when I am seated at one of her feasts. Her store-rooms display perfect miracles of the culinary

art;—such entrancing pickles; such luscious preserves; such crystalline jellies, were never seen elsewhere. I am always reminded of poor Keats' exquisite line—'lucent syrups tinct with cinnamon.' But, perhaps you have the dyspepsia!"

Thorne did not pretend to try to keep his countenance at her wry look of inquiry.

"I am happy to say that the malady is unknown to me by personal experience."

"Indeed. I thought all theologues were dyspeptic; that they took the complaint, as a part of their course, along with metaphysics, Hebrew and Greek. Miriam—"

"I think you are forgetting your promise, now," suggested Mr. Fry.

"Hugh! I am ashamed of you! As if I *could* say any thing derogatory of Miriam! When you know perfectly well that I think her worth any ten of the other girls hereabouts! I was only going to repeat what she said, when we had the meeting of Synod here two years ago. The committee upon delegates assigned no less than four incipient divines to her mother's care. One lived upon toast and tea; another upon mush and milk; a third never touched butter or gravy, or bread that was less than a week old; while a fourth drank nothing but cold water, three times a day, thought desserts of all descriptions rank poison, and took a sedative mixture every night."

"I think you have improved upon that story, since I last heard you repeat it," interposed Mr. Fry, joining in Thorne's laugh.

"I tell the tale as it was told to me, and you acknowledge yourself that Miriam is the soul of truth, even in trifles," retorted his wife. "She said that her mother's face, at the first dinner to which she set them down, was a study for a comic artist. The dear lady's expression of amazement,

concern and despair surpassed all powers of description, as dish after dish was declined by the trio, and the nervous sufferer fidgeted with his glass of ice-water, and complained of 'prostration;' the four expansive white cravats looking, as Miriam expressed it, 'like so many flags of truce, appealing helplessly and piteously, to the commandress of the beleaguering forces.' I shall never see a starched, immaculate neck-tie around a ministerial throat again, without recollecting this. I am glad you do not sport one, Mr. Thorne!"

"It is a mere objection of taste on my part. I dislike the indiscriminate and continual display of any badge of office. A soldier upon parade must assume his uniform, but his bravery and loyalty are none the less staunch in the plain clothes to which he returns when the review is over. In his lodge, the Mason wears the insignia, which would be in the eyes of others a ridiculous vanity, if flaunted in the public streets, or in his place of business. I confess to a partiality for a clerical dress, when worn in the pulpit alone, but it should be one that could be laid off in the vestry, before leaving the church. I cannot see the propriety or becomingness of its every day use."

"Miriam played well to-day!" was Mrs. Fry's next digression.

"Very finely!" responded her husband.

"Is your organist a lady?" inquired Thorne.

"Of course! else, why should they have erected that forlorn little barricade, like a bar-room window or a fire-screen, before her seat? If she faced the people, or if they faced her, and she were more afflicted with bashfulness than the eight or ten girls who stand up to sing, without so much as a curtain before their open mouths, there would be some sense in this ultra show of delicacy. Dr. Stanton gave the instrument to the church."

"Indeed! that was exceedingly liberal."

"Wasn't it? But it is just like him! As I was saying, Miriam has a passion for music, and at school she had taken a fancy to learn to play on the organ, so she was importuned to take charge of this one. The night before the dedication of the building, there was a grand choir-rehearsal, and then it appeared that, during the day, one of our over-considerate deacons had caused this ridiculous affair to be constructed and fixed in the gallery—a wooden frame, with green baize tacked over it. I shall never forget—John! Mr. Thorne will take more cream with his strawberries! I shall never forget how Miriam bit her lip and tried not to look disconcerted, when she saw it. And there stood the worthy designer, rubbing his hands, and waiting to be thanked for his thoughtful politeness!

"'How do you like it, Miss Miriam?' he said, finding that her gratitude was not very voluble. 'A neat little nook—quite retired! Don't you think so?'

"'Yes sir—it *is* very retired!'

"'You observe that there is no publicity connected with your office now,' he went on to say. 'As it was before, I knew that you must suffer great annoyance.'

"'It was unconscious annoyance, then, sir, so far as I was concerned, since my face was turned entirely away from the congregation. However, I have been told repeatedly, that my bonnet, this winter, is too modest, and I have no doubt that it is much obliged to you for the protection.'

"Another piece of pie, Mr. Thorne?"

"No, thank you, madam!"

"You had better! Just a tiny bit! Now, Miriam never said any thing ill-natured in her life, and everybody that knows her is aware of this. But she is hasty, and sometimes more decided than the stereotyped girls of this generation, these bread-and-butter angels, in white muslin—gen-

erally indifferent copies of Washington Irving's 'Wife.' You recollect how cleverly his 'Mary' set out the supper-table under the trees, when she had never done a stroke of housework before, and found a strawberry bed in the garden, and picked a bowlful, without staining the white muslin or roughening her hands, and came flying out to tell her husband how 'happy' they were going to be, just as any baby would behave over a new toy! I venture to say she changed her tune when baking-day came around! But Miriam says and does characteristic things—an unpardonable transgression in the estimation of commonplace people, and most people now-a-days *are* commonplace—and on this occasion she would have acted more wisely if she had thanked her officious friend, instead of laughing at him, for there were two or three demure misses within hearing—"

"Fanny!"

"I haven't called a single person's name, my love! Two or three proper young ladies, who were never tempted to utter a saucy thing within their recollection, and poor Miriam's silly little saying was all over town by the next day, and unsparingly criticised, you may be sure. Miriam has her peculiarities—that is—some symptoms of individuality—but you will be friends, I think, Mr. Thorne. She is a noble girl, and I should be sorry were you to conceive a dislike for her, before you come to know her well. I have spoken thus freely of her, because you are to be thrown so much together, living in the same house—"

"Ah!" Mr. Thorne looked up. "Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of Miriam Hartley—Mrs. Hartley's only daughter, to be sure! I thought you knew that all the while."

"I never heard of her before. I was told that Dr. Stanton's family consisted of himself, his widowed daughter, and two grandchildren."

Mrs. Fry laughed mischievously.

"And are you horror-stricken at the idea of meeting in one of these grandchildren, a young lady, intelligent, good-looking, and accomplished? Set your mind at rest! Nobody ever thought of coupling Miriam's name with that of a clergyman—besides—no matter what! Suffice it to say that you and she can be the best of friends, and the gossips will never object."

There were several reasons why this unforeseen discovery was not altogether agreeable to Mr. Thorne. He had pictured to himself a quiet, semi-rural retreat, at Dr. Stanton's, where he could study or rest, with the freedom from restraint he had enjoyed in his mother's, and latterly, his sister's house. To this free-and-easy mode of life a young lady might be a most serious drawback. Would she want him to entertain her? to do escort duty? to talk poetry and light literature? in fine, to enact the rôle of brotherly friend or gallant cavalier? Then, again, he dreaded *prononcée* women. Miss Hartley's partial but imprudent advocate had conveyed an unfortunate impression of her "characteristic" girl to the mind of her auditor. He wished that he had braved the busybodies of the boarding-houses, or the bar-rooms and loafers of the hotels, instead of accepting the shelter of her grandfather's roof.

All through the afternoon of preparation in his study, the vague consciousness of something disagreeable impending upon the morrow, troubled him, causing him, now and then to lay down his pen or book, to recollect what was the definite source of uneasiness.

"I wish I had never heard of the girl!" he said once, impatiently. "Yet why should I care if she is flippant and sarcastic? I can have as little to do with her as I like."

As the hour of service approached, worldly vexations and

trifling cares were forgotten in the thought of the solemnities of the occasion. Few men have ever entered the sacred desk imbued with a more profound sense of the responsibilities assumed by such a step; few have ever prayed with a more earnest and single heart than did he on this night, that he might be only a vessel in the Master's temple, which, purged from earthliness and vanity, might be filled with the things of God, and he be enabled to give them forth as freely as he had received.

A long, trembling note from the organ, floated out upon the holy stillness of the church, as the pastor entered, and into its harmony presently stole others, as soft and weirdly sweet; pulsating, like the voiceless prayer of many hearts, throbbing with sacred awe and grateful adoration; then gratitude swelled into praise, and praise into rapture, and exulting thanksgiving found words in the grand chorus—"The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof!"

A warmer tint suffused Mrs. Fry's rosy cheeks, as the text of the evening sermon was announced—"I magnify mine office." But for the manuscript which she had seen Mr. Thorne place within the Bible, she would have suspected that the inception of the discourse had been her strictures that noon.

The main body of the discourse was a forcible, perspicuous exposition of the origin and nature of the pastoral office; its Divine authority; the obligations of him who held it, to the Supreme Head of the church, and his duties to those confided to his care. The exordium was calm, if the term be taken as a synonym of dispassionate. But the nerve and earnestness of the man showed themselves in the ring of each sentence—terse and energetic as his strong Anglo-Saxon could make it. You felt that it was morally and physically impossible for him to do any thing by halves; that there was not a drop of torpid blood in his system. If

he were coolly argumentative, it was because his will curbed his native impetuosity. He reasoned ably, with a lofty disdain of sophistry and evasions; never letting a subject go until he had sifted it thoroughly, and proved to his auditors that his work was well done. On this occasion he seemed impressed by the thought that he was laying the foundation upon which he was to labor for years, and resolved to quit his conscience of all blame if the matter were not comprehended in its length and breadth, and its importance duly estimated by those among whom he was to exercise the functions of his calling.

Diligently, zealously, he "magnified the office," sweeping away from its unadorned greatness alike the specious gauds which mysticism and superstition had hung about it, and the tarnish and filth left by the presumptuous hands of skeptics and scoffers. With a few masterly touches he sketched the Great First Shepherd in His earthly ministry; whether teaching in the synagogue of Capernaum, among His own people, or preaching from the deck of a fishing-smack to the mixed multiude upon the sands of Tiberias; mourning with the sisters of Bethany, by the tomb of their brother and His friend, and saying, in divine accents, to the widowed mother of Nain, "Weep not;" rebuking, with the awful voice and gesture of a God, the sacrilegious defilers of His Father's house, and the heaven-daring iniquities of the wolves in sheeps' clothing, who in wilful blindness led the blind into error and perdition; and laying His hand caressingly upon the childish head that nestled in His bosom; mingling with beneficent kindness in the cheerful throng at the wedding-feast of Cana; sitting down to meat with publicans and sinners; and, on the eve of His cruel murder, eating with His disciples that most sad and solemn of feasts, that was to be a memorial of His coming sufferings to all future ages; giving up His soul unto death, and remembering, amid His

agonies, to make provision for the maintenance of her who had given Him birth;—the wondrous, matchless story, summed up in the simple phrase, "He went about doing good."

"Behold the Prototype Pastor, in whose footsteps we are bidden to walk; however far removed from His perfection we may be, by the grossness of our humanity, and the defilement of the sin which never polluted His soul! wherever and whenever there is *good* to be done, there and then it is our duty to do it: not alone in temples reared to His honor; but by the fireside; in the fields; in the crowded mart of business; in the house of mourning, and the house of feasting; standing and sitting and walking with you—not as one set apart to a priesthood of mystic types and ominous ceremonies, shadowing forth Divine wrath and human expiation, but as the brother to whose keeping glad tidings of great joy have been committed—precious treasures, held in trust by him for you and your children—faithful to warn, to entreat, to exhort; never swerving, by a hair's breadth, from the path of right; yet, so far as that right allows him to do it, 'giving none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of GOD; pleasing all men in all things, not seeking his own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.'"

"That they may be saved!" The repressed earnestness spoke out now in eye, in form, in voice, as he poured forth a rapid appeal to those who hung breathless upon his lips. Here was the spring of every effort; the secret of every self-denial; the glorious anticipation, that made a life of sacrifice and toil seem a poor, unworthy price with which to purchase the crown of living, eternal stars.

Mrs. Fry waited in the vestibule—very silent, very subdued—until Mr. Thorne came out of church. However mythical the Valley of Humiliation might have been usu-

ally, she felt it to-night to be a serious reality. She grasped Neale's hand, the traces of tears still fresh upon her cheeks.

"I could not go home until I had thanked you, from the bottom of my heart, for what you have just said to us, and told you how grieved and ashamed I am of my behavior to-day. You will never hear me ridicule ministers of the gospel again!"

And he never did.

CHAPTER IV.

MONDAY.

If the second day of the Christian week be "blue Monday" to the school-boy, it is assuredly, if any just degree of comparison be observed, "black Monday"--and no grayish shade of sable, at that—to the working clergyman. The string which, yesterday, stretched every fibre to its utmost tension, is relaxed, and the unbent bow lies a useless, uncomely thing. The glow of composition has departed, and with it the fervor of delivery, and the reactionary animation gathered from the pleased or earnest attention depicted in the countenances of the auditory. The red current in the veins and the thoughts in the brain flow alike languidly. What were plains, twelve hours since, over which the church militant had only to march in triumphal procession, with banners flying and songs of jubilee, have arisen, with volcanic suddenness, into mountains of darkness and difficulty. The standard wavers in the tremulous hand of the leader, and the trumpet sends forth a dismally uncertain sound. Nor is the effect of this hebdomadal visitation ever lessened by the recollection that the victim has recovered from others equally as severe, fifty times during each year of his pastorate. The mental hypochondria is proof against the consolations to be derived from past deliverances or the promise of better days to come. His strength, his piety, his usefulness, are on the wane, he says. Talk not to him of the brilliant success of the preceding day, or you shall

receive for reply the confidential moan that he wrung out the last dregs of a once-vigorous intellect in those two discourses, that a monument, not wholly contemptible, might mark where his shattered bark went down; as you would express it, he "died game," but of the fact of his decease he has not a doubt.

Remind him not of the great work that lies before him; hint not at pastoral visits to be paid every day of the week; of the funeral on Tuesday; the anniversary of the Tract or Colonization Society, that falls on Wednesday, when he is to deliver a soul-stirring address, not one line of which is yet composed; the seventh lecture on the "Reconcilement of Science with Revelation" he has promised his people for their Thursday evening gathering; of the monthly meeting of Consistory or Session or Vestry, to be held in his study, on Friday night;—above all, never suggest to him that from that benumbed, inert, exhausted brain, there *must* be hammered out two sermons—new, profound, striking, popular—"profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," before another day of rest (for the laity) comes around.

Rather, if you are his wife, lure him into your sewing-room or nursery, or wherever you are to be, and books are *not;* give up to his use the lounge, or most commodious chair; talk blithely of home matters, however homely, so long as they are not vexatious, or of the pleasant *on dits* of the day; sing while you sew, as if from the gladness of your own full and happy heart, snatches of the ballads you trolled together and loved, in the fresh, dewy days of courtship; if your children are obedient, affectionate little creatures—as all ministerial offspring ought to be—let them climb upon his knee, and pass their cool, dimpled hands over his hot eyes and haggard face, and coo in his ear their stories of baby frolics and baby-loves. It will do no harm, and serve,

probably, as a wholesome diversion, if the "naughty waggon" that "broke itself," and the equally wrong-headed dolly who, in sheer wickedness, fractured one leg and both arms, be produced for sympathy, and mending, if practicable—in which latter case a bit of cord or wood, a tack or two, and a bottle of that invaluable housewife's assistant, "prepared glue," should be within "mamma's" reach.

If you are only his friend, and are acquainted with his secret weaknesses, look in upon him occasionally, on some Monday when you feel particularly fresh, and you can guess from the evidences of laborious thought and preparation in the Sabbath sermons that *he* feels unusually jaded; greet him with a cheery smile and tone, and without remarking upon his pale and dolorous visage, rattle on with an ecstatic description of the superb lot of partridges, or snipe, or miscellaneous feathered animals, which Smith or Jenkins shot in the mountains or woods, or upon the meadows, the other day; tell him of the tempting dish of trout or perch Brown had for supper when you dropped in there, last week, and suggest to him that you and he would enjoy a hunt or fish as much as any two men of your acquaintance, inviting him to participate in a little castle building, as to day, route, tackle, etc. Should he not affect field-sports or the piscatory art, and you have a carriage and he has none—which is extremely probable, by the way—you will perform a charitable and meritorious deed by sending or bringing your favorite trotter around to the Parsonage, and giving him a drive into the country. Most of the cloth have a remarkable *penchant* for horse-flesh. If your man has, let him handle the ribbons; while you enjoy the sight of the new life awakening in his frame and eye, as his fingers thrill in grasping the taut rein, the color and vigor in cheek and lips, as the fleet courser dashes off at his word of command. In enjoying these, you can easily overcome the unworthy qualm of puritanical

straitlacedness that may beset you at the thought of Mrs. Grundy's holy horror, should she chance to hear that "the minister" was seen driving Mr. Truefriend's fast horse down the turnpike at the uncanonical rate of six miles an hour, "when good old Mr. Mouldy—blessed saint in heaven that he is! never rode for pleasure—only in funeral processions!"

A satisfactory explanation, we may remark, of the lamentable fact that the model pastor rode in his own funeral train by the time he was five-and-forty, and that every body, remembering his frosted head and round shoulders, still speaks of him as "old Mr. Mouldy."

Yes! let your minister shoot, fish, drive, and be merry, like any other man who has a stomach, lungs and liver, and who lives by the sweat of his brains as well as his brow; and you will find that his head, hands and heart will serve you twice as well, and twice as long, as would the monstrosity of sublimated intellect many very pious but fearfully selfish or iguorant people are wont to picture to themselves as the *ne plus ultra* of clerical perfection. Men and brethren! I speak without irreverence when I say, that upon the under shepherd who watches over your fold, are laid the sins and infirmities of all those whom the Master has given into his hands. But for the grace which is sent with the burden, mortality could not endure the load. In the name of mercy and religion, look to it that you do not make it unbearable!

Neale Thorne had neither wife nor friend to soothe or inspirit him in the dull, miserable reaction that succeeded his inaugural Sabbath. He summoned whatever he could of natural buoyancy of temperament, to enable him to maintain a show of cheerfulness in the presence of others. It was very hard work—he was amazed to find how hard—to receive, with even an appearance of smiling interest, the visitors who called during the forenoon he spent at Mr. Roberts'.

All were friendly; most of them would have been agreeable upon any day except Monday. Many kind, and not a few complimentary things were said of his introductory discourse, and he strove to feel grateful for the encouragement, but the hours dragged by in horrible weariness. Struggle as he might with the incubus, he felt that his smile was growing more visibly mechanical; his ideas and their attempted expression more vague. Before the list of morning calls was finished, there arrived the five elders, who were Mr. Roberts' colleagues, to the family dinner they were invited to eat with their principal and pastor. With mental groanings and bodily nausea, Neale went through the dreary ceremonial, while the excellent brethren—who had only listened to the sermons he had prepared with so much care, and slumbered soundly through the hours he had counted as he tossed to and fro, too excited to sleep, in spite of fatigue —these six worthies, in blissful ignorance of the chief guest's unfitness for social enjoyment, ate, drank and talked, with the gleeful content of men who felt that their ecclesiastical venture was a capital one; a success, which would accrue to the building up of the church and denomination.

Dr. Stanton was one of this august body;—a man still erect and handsome, notwithstanding his white hair and grown-up grandchild. He was a true Kentuckian of the higher class; a son of the soil, and proud of the name; frank and honorable in his intercourse with men; chivalric and gentle toward women. No citizen had more of the respect of the community; none was more beloved by those who knew him. Thorne had conceived an instant liking for him at their first interview, a feeling heightened by all he had seen and heard of him since. To-day he was not capable of appreciating this, or any other society. The Doctor was more watchful of him. Before the feast was over, he noted that all sprightliness was gone from the young man's eye

and countenance; that he moved and spoke like one in a dream, and judging that he had had a surfeit of company, and moreover, mindful of the necessity that he should be at his best estate that evening, when he was to have a grand reception party at the Doctor's own house, he hastened their departure.

Mr. Thorne's baggage had been sent up that morning, and the two gentlemen stepped into the light carriage which was waiting for them at the door.

"You are tired, Mr. Thorne," remarked the old gentleman, as they drove off. "We have been inconsiderate in pressing our attentions upon you, I am afraid. Few of us are as thoughtful as we should be, of the wearing effects of mental exertion upon the body."

"I shall economize my strength more wisely after a while, I trust," rejoined Neale. "My draughts upon my nervous and muscular system were unnecessarily large, yesterday. There was something in the novelty of my situation which excited me more than I dreamed of, at the time. I did not suspect this until I found, last night, that I must gaze, with eyes that would not shut, upon a sea of human faces, all turned toward me. Then too, I had travelled for two days and nights, stopping only for my meals, and sat up until three o'clock on Saturday morning. It was very injudicious, and I have paid the penalty of my folly. I usually sleep well and awake refreshed."

"As you will to-night, I hope, and always hereafter, when you are once accustomed to your position. I regret that we have appointed this evening for your home-warming; but you shall go to your room, immediately upon your arrival, and sleep for two or three hours."

Stimulated partly by shame at his unwonted weakness, and partly by gratitude for his host's kind sympathy, Thorne conducted himself, at meeting the ladies of the

family, with more ease and life than he had showed for several hours past. In this, there may have been a secret and unacknowledged revolt of pride, at the thought of being ranked in Miss Hartley's category of valetudinarian theologues. Certain it is, that he colored slightly on being presented to her, and that his bow, although courteous, was more stately than exactly befitted the circumstances. There was, to a casual observer, nothing very remarkable in the appearance of Mrs. Fry's favorite. A slender figure, a trifle above the average height of woman; a dark, rather pale complexion; brown or black eyes, that met his steadily, but not boldly, and a sweeter voice than he had expected from the lips of the flippant Amazon of his imaginings—these were the main details of the portrait which Thorne added to his retentive gallery of memory. He rarely forgot a face—a happy qualification for a public man. Mrs. Hartley resembled her father, and there was little likeness between mother and daughter, except in voice. The elder lady had been a beauty in her youth, and was still fair to look upon; but there were traces of sorrow upon her mild features, and untimely snow-flakes among her abundant tresses. Her reception of the new inmate of their home was, as Mrs. Fry had led him to anticipate, motherly in its cordiality.

Dr. Stanton allowed but a few minutes for welcomes and preliminary conversation.

"I have some professional visits to make this afternoon, Mr. Thorne," he said. "If you please, I will show you your room, before I go."

It was a large, airy apartment, situated directly above the parlor, in the front of the house; commanding a pleasing view of the town and river, and supplied with quaint, old-fashioned, but most comfortable furniture.

"This is your castle, my dear sir," said the host. "Until you bring Mrs. Thorne to the parsonage, down there in

Limestone, I hope that you will consider our home as your own—not only this sanctum, but the whole house. There is a horse in the stable, which is subject to your orders, and to those of no one else. As your physician and his owner, I would advise that you do not let him suffer for want of exercise."

Neale clasped the friendly hand, with strong emotion.

"I would thank you, sir, as I should, for your great and undeserved kindness to an untried stranger, but I have no words with which to do this. I trust that I shall never give you occasion to regret the day in which you provided such an asylum for the homeless."

"The favor is done to me," answered the Doctor. "I have buried my wife, my three sons and a son-in-law, hardly less dear than they, from this house, sir. All of my family who survive, reside under this roof. It is a pleasant thought to me that I shall again hear the hearty tread and voice of a young man about the old place. Now, I will leave you to the rest you need so much. They will have orders below not to disturb you until tea-time."

But the point of fatigue, mental and physical, at which Sleep comes uncalled, with relief and cure in her poppy-cups, had passed. In vain Neale courted the fickle goddess by all the expedients of which he had any knowledge. He thought over the dullest books, the most prosy lectures he had ever read or heard; said the alphabet and multiplication table forward and backward; but to no purpose, unless it were to awaken him more effectually. Even the beautiful and generally infallible experiment of picturing, with closed eyes, a wheat-field, ripe for harvest, and tossing, in successive undulations before the sweep of a summer breeze, was an abortive effort. Finally, he lost all patience, and, it is to be feared, very nearly lost his temper with it. He called himself a whimsical baby, a nervous fool, and—

whisper it!—a woman! "a silly woman at that!" Having reached this climax of contemptuous self-objurgation, he jumped up, tore off his dressing-gown, put on his coat, brushed his hair, and took up his hat.

"I will walk a couple of miles, and come back as good as new!" he said, throwing back his head—a habit he had when he meant to be particularly resolute or obstinate; a gesture very like the clever manœuvre by which a mettled horse manages to get the bit between his teeth.

A sick giddiness punished him for the defiant shake, but he was not to be turned aside. He would cure himself of these fine-lady airs! He walked down the stairs very hard, if not very steadily, and out upon the piazza. Here he was met, face to face, by Miriam Hartley. She carried a vase of flowers in her hand, which she seemed to have just replenished from a rose-tree climbing over the porch. Thorne smiled, touched his hat, and was passing on, but she stood still in his way.

"Have you been asleep, Mr. Thorne?"

"I have not. I am weary, yet restless, and am about to try the recuperative effects of a brisk walk. That road will take me directly into the country, will it not?"

"You need rest—not exercise!" Miriam said, with the grave directness of a child. "Grandpapa says that you are over-excited and want repose. You ought not to walk. I know just how you feel. I am often a prey to this nervous restlessness, when I have been reading or thinking too hard."

She stood in the same spot, holding her vase, and looking up at him, with such serious simplicity, and speaking so positively, that he was obliged to smile.

"Let me carry this in for you," he said, taking the vase.

"Thank you." She showed him where to set it—upon a stand in the parlor—then resumed her expostulation. "You

felt too wide awake up-stairs to think of slumber; your thoughts wandered to all manner of distracting subjects, and you became irritated, at last, with such uncompromising wakefulness, and determined to tire yourself down in the open air. Have I made a fair diagnosis of your case?"

"I cannot deny it."

"Have you forgotten that you are to play the agreeable for four or five hours to-night, to a miscellaneous host of friends?"

"I have not; but the walk will revive me."

"It will not! You will suffer greatly, disappoint your guests, and distress us—for it is our doing, inviting them to meet you."

Another qualm that made his brain swim, compelled Thorne to subscribe inwardly to the truth of this proposition.

"What would you prescribe, if you reject my remedy?"

"Just this." She opened a door leading into a smaller apartment than that in which they were standing. "This is grandpapa's study—his 'snuggery,' as he calls it. There is the lounge, where he takes his daily siesta; it is a true 'sleepy hollow,' as all aver who have ever tried it. No one will enter this room until he comes home. My prescription is, that you commit yourself to the somnolent genius who presides over that charmed corner."

The nook was tempting, but Thorne demurred.

"What would Dr. Stanton say, were I to take such a liberty with his especial domain?"

"Has he not told you that this is Liberty Hall? I know him better than you do, and I engage that he shall be delighted. I do not act without orders. One thing more: I have a question to ask, which you will please answer frankly—can I depend upon you to do so?"

"If I can, I will be candid—most certainly!"

"There is nothing to prevent you from speaking freely, unless it be some mistaken scruple of politeness, and that would be very unfair to yourself and to me. Mrs. Fry told me this morning, that you, in speaking to her yesterday of your sister, said that it was your habit, when you were sick or tired, to lie down upon the sofa and have her play some soft, soothing air until you fell asleep. I have nothing to do at present; if the music would act as a lullaby, it would give me pleasure to play for you. You can close the study-door if the piano is too loud."

Now Mr. Neale Thorne was as fully conscious that this was a singular proposal as am I, who record it, or even as you, dear shrinking reader, who drop the book to clasp your lily fingers in thankfulness over your superior delicacy—or prudery. It was very odd, and shocking, and all that—yet, strange to say, our fastidious hero was neither shocked nor displeased. He could not impute forwardness or lack of modesty to the girl, whose face he was searching. There was a noble candor in all that she said; an absence of affectation in every action and word, that refreshed and fascinated him. Her grandfather had, without doubt, commended him to her care, should he appear below-stairs while he was absent, and she discharged her mission with as little reserve and in as good faith, as though she were Dr. Stanton junior. In his inner mind, Neale invested her at once with an honorary order—the motto, "*Honi soit qui mal y pense.*" He seemed to read it upon her forehead—set, like a frontlet, between the clear, honest eyes.

"I accept your offer as sincerely as it is made," he said. "Should Sleepy Hollow fulfill the pledges you have tendered for it, I rely upon you to see that I am not exhibited to the expected guests as a masculine edition of the 'Sleeping Beauty.'"

She promised merrily, and, as he pushed the door of the inner room half-shut after him, he saw her seat herself at the piano, between the parlor windows. She chanced to select a piece of music which was already a favorite with him—Wallace's "*Le Rêve.*" The light shimmered faintly through the trees without and the curtains within; the cushions were plump and downy, and, for perhaps five minutes, he lay amongst them, hearkening to the soft melody that flowed from her deft fingers; then, it became the murmuring of a lazy brook over its pebbly bed; then, the low rush of the wind through forest pines, dying away—dying—dying! ——and he was aroused by a hearty shake, to behold Dr. Stanton standing over him, with a lamp in his hand.

"Well done!" exclaimed the old gentleman, laughing. "This is the kind of sleep that 'knits up the ravelled sleeve of care!' I am sorry to disturb you, but we may expect company now in less than an hour."

"I have had a royal nap!" said Thorne, rising. "How long has it lasted? What time is it?"

He had slept nearly three hours, and Nature expressed herself as entirely satisfied with her revenge for the wrongs done her during a few days past. Thanking the Doctor for his prescription and the use of his sofa, Thorne ran up-stairs with a fleet step and a light heart. Before he began his toilette, a servant presented himself, bearing a supper-tray, spread with a variety of substantial viands and delicate adjuncts to an evening meal.

"My mistis thought perhaps you wouldn't desire to come down to supper, sir, seein' you are in somethin' of a haste to dress, sir," was the accompanying remark of the man, as he went to work to arrange the repast upon the table. "Shall I stay and wait upon you, sir?" he added, when all was ready. "Is there any thing else you can think of that it would please you to have, Mr. Thorne?"

"Nothing, thank you! I am much obliged to Mrs. Hartley for her kindness, and also to you, Parker."

Parker bowed, grinned, and backed toward the door. Nothing pleases a negro more than to be called by his name upon a short acquaintance. Mr. Thorne had seen this man but once before, when he took the Doctor's horse at the gate upon their arrival, yet the gentleman had noticed him, caught his title from his master's lips, and remembered it.

"He's one of the *born* ones—none of your Yankee shams!" was his report in the kitchen, and upon all points of aristocracy, Parker was high authority; for he was "raised" in Eastern Virginia, and had only lived at Dr. Stanton's since he was twenty-one—a period of twenty-four years. He was one of the Hartley servants, having been sent to Kentucky, upon the division of his "ole master's" estate, as a portion of the late Mr. Hartley's patrimonial inheritance.

Unconscious that his instinctive tact had procured for him such a powerful friend, Thorne dispatched his supper with the appetite of a healthy man who had fasted all day, the breakfast and dinner he had pretended to eat, counting for nothing. While he dressed he had time to reflect upon the fallibility of human resolves, as exemplified in the scene that had passed between Miss Hartley and himself. Had he not determined to be very indifferent as to her society and her opinion? to be manly and decided in his course of speech and action, uninfluenced by her tart criticisms and pert suggestions? Mrs. Fry would have leased the valley for a month, had she surmised what effect her intended praises of Miriam had produced. Had he not vowed that she would be the last person in the community to whom he would apply for sympathy and nursing, if he were sick? a girl, who could ridicule the infirmities of her mother's

guests, and repay, by a sneer, the well-meant efforts of a friend to secure her comfort! Yet the recollection of her raillery about the four flags of truce had not prevented him from lowering *his* flag of independent volition, at her bidding. By less than ten minutes' parley, she had reversed his purpose, and induced him to follow her counsel instead. He wondered if she were amused by memories of the water-drinkers' complaints of "prostration," while he lay prostrate and supine, among her grandfather's pillows, and she played him to sleep, as she might have lulled a fretful, teething child! A button broke off in his hand, or, rather, tore out, bringing a bit of sound linen along with it, as the last idea crossed his mind.

"Catch me making such a fool of myself again!" he said, with some vehemence, which the mishap of the button had no share in exciting. He kept his resolution bravely—until he went down stairs. Dr. Stanton and Mrs. Hartley were in the drawing-room ready to receive their guests, and Thorne was still answering the inquiries of the latter, by representing his complete renovation of body and spirits, when Miriam entered, leading a little boy about five years of age.

She was dressed in a white, fleecy robe, full and floating; with scarlet flowers in her hair, and the same as breast and shoulder-knots—apparel that became her well. She spoke pleasantly to Thorne, with no allusion to his slumber or health. Her grandfather had reported him well, and she seldom asked questions, unless she really desired information.

"Here is a young gentleman who considers himself slighted because he has not seen Mr. Thorne, except in the pulpit," she said, putting forward her companion.

He was a very pretty child, with large blue eyes and sunny curls; but hung his head, as he heard the allusion to his discontent.

"Mr. Thorne feels slighted, too, because he has not seen *him* before," rejoined Neale, lifting him to his knee. "We must make up for lost time by getting acquainted very fast. There is another thing which I do not think is quite fair. You know my name, and I have never heard yours. What is it?"

"Willie Henry Hartley. I don't like Henry, so you can call me Willie, if you please, sir."

"Why do you dislike 'Henry?' I think it is a very pretty name.

"Henry stole the nest from the apple-tree, with the five dear little blue eggs in it, and broke them, and the mother-bird cried herself to death. He was a naughty, bad boy!"

Miriam explained—"That was an unfortunate story which I read to him from a child's paper, and his abhorrence of the conduct of the Henry therein described, has extended itself to his middle name. He has always been called 'Willie,' for his uncle—his mother's brother—but I am sorry that he is disposed to discard the 'Henry' entirely, for it, too, is a family name.

Dr. Stanton walked away, and looked out of a dark window, and Thorne, hearing Mrs. Hartley sigh deeply, supposed that the child was the namesake of one of her lost friends—probably her husband. Willie was scanning his face meanwhile, and followed up Miriam's remark by a not very relevant piece of natural history.

"The busy bee has a pocketful of honey that she has sucked out of the flowers, and wax rolled all around her legs."

"Indeed! who told you that?"

"Milly"—nodding his head toward Miriam. "And to-day, we found a dead bee, and she showed me the pocket and the yellow wax. I am sorry it died, though! I'm afraid the baby-bees will cry for something to eat to-night.

Mamma has plenty of honey in the store-room, and I wanted to carry them some for supper, but Milly said that God would take better care of them than I could."

"He can, and will, my boy!" answered Thorne—then, looking at Miriam, "Have you never thought that the highest style of faith is also the simplest? The ripest saint on earth can never attain to more than the literal belief and confidence in the 'Thus saith the Lord!' which your little pupil displays, in leaving the objects of his pity to Him, who notes the sparrow's fall."

"I can hardly call him my pupil," she returned with a tremulous smile. "I am often humbled by his unquestioning trust, when contrasted with my fears and speculations. Such faith is peculiarly the children's portion, in the earthly kingdom."

"Few of us regain it when it is once lost," said Mrs. Hartley.

Willie slipped from Mr. Thorne's knee, and went over to Miriam. She would have taken him upon her lap, but he objected.

"No! no! Milly! it would tumble your dress!"

He smoothed the folds of her skirt with an amusing mixture of pride and solicitude; handling the thin texture daintily with his slight fingers.

"I am to sit up until ten o'clock," he pursued, to Neale. "I hope a great many people will come in by that time. I want to see all the prettiest ladies."

"Already!" laughed Thorne. "Are you so fond of the ladies, then, Willie?"

"I like them—yes, sir! But why I want to look at them, to-night, is to see whether Milly isn't mistaken."

"Willie!" said Miriam, warningly.

"Go on, my boy!" urged Dr. Stanton, who loved a joke. "What did Milly say?"

"She said what you don't believe, grandpa, nor I either," rejoined the boy, stoutly. "I told her that she would be the prettiest lady in the room, and she said there would be fifty twenty times as handsome; and that nobody ever thought of calling her a beauty but me."

A burst of laughter interrupted the loyal little knight, who, greatly abashed, hid his face upon Miriam's shoulder.

"Never mind, Willie!" Thorne drew him to his side, and affected to whisper. "You shall tell us, to-morrow morning, at breakfast, what you think, after having seen all the others. I do not believe that you will change your mind."

"Nor I," replied Miriam, "if beauty depend, as some say it does, more upon the optics seeing, than upon the object seen."

She said this gayly and unaffectedly, acquitting Thorne, by her manner, of any intention to flatter her, and accepting his remark, as he meant she should, as a salvo for the child's mortification.

The Frys headed the list of arrivals. The lady flitted into the room, very animated and very pretty, with her bright smiles and rose-colored silk. Her attire was tasteful, except that she wore too many ribbons, or rather too many ends of ribbon. All her bows had streamers, long or short, and they fluttered, when she moved, like so many impaled butterflies. Why is it—let me ask the wise in such concerns—that the dresses of short women so often develop this disposition to redundant ornament? Is it upon the principle that obtains in floriculture, whereby, when a thrifty stalk is dwarfed by "topping," it forthwith throws out a host of sprouts and buds—three times the number that would have garnished the trunk, had not its height been curtailed?

Mrs. Fry shook hands with Mrs. Hartley and the Doctor; gave Mr. Thorne her gloved fingers to squeeze, if he liked;

kissed Miriam's cheek, and had Willie in her lap, before any one else recovered breath from the rush of her *entrée*, or the child could represent the damage her robe might sustain from his weight.

"You angel!" she said, showering kisses upon his lips, eyes, and hair. "Absolutely, you grow lovelier every day! Have your wings begun to unfold yet? Did you feel for them, as I told you to do?"

"As I wish you never had told him!" answered Miriam. "I was alarmed, the other night, at half-past nine—when I supposed he had been asleep an hour—by his appearance in the parlor, where mamma and I were sitting. He had lain awake, thinking over all the nonsense you had talked to him that afternoon, until it occurred to him to feel for the wings whose unfolding you had predicted. Down-stairs he rushed, and burst into this room, out of breath with haste and excitement: 'Oh, Milly! I can't stay with you much longer, for my wings are sprouting!' He had just discovered that he had shoulder-blades! And, indeed, their shape was not unlike what one might imagine budding wings would be."

Mrs. Fry screamed with laughter. "The rogue! the cunning little darling! Wasn't it too clever an idea?"

"Very clever in you to suggest the investigation, and in him to undertake it; but the next time you set him about such work, you will please stay and take care of him, until the restoration of his natural state of composure. I had to sit by him until midnight before he closed his eyes."

She spoke playfully, but there was enough of earnest in her manner, coupled with her account of the effect of the delusion upon the sensitive child, to convince Thorne that she had not told the story without an object. He was satisfied of this when he saw her, after a time, leave a group of visitors, and, approaching Mrs. Fry, who still held Willie,

speak some words in the ear of the latter. The boy was, childlike, pleased and flattered by the notice and caresses he received, and, encouraged by Mrs. Fry, was growing talkative, and rather noisy. He left the lady's lap at Miriam's whisper.

"Milly wants me to stand by her and see them all come in," he said, apologetically, to his admirer.

"Very right, dear. Very wrong in *you!*" she subjoined to his guardian, shaking her finger menacingly. "I understand you!"

Miriam laughed, and bore off her prize.

"The influence she has over that boy is perfectly astonishing!" continued Mrs. Fry to Thorne, who was standing near. "He is a remarkable child—one of these ethereal fairies that you are all the while expecting to see melt into air entirely, or float off into the clouds, before your eyes—their bodily casing is so thin and their souls so expansive. He is one of the sweetest, most interesting creatures I ever saw; but I am glad my girl is solid flesh and blood, and no mistake. I sleep more soundly now, than if I had to feel in her crib every hour to see whether she had not vanished—been spirited away—what little of body there was—to Elf-land. Miriam says she is never troubled by such fancies; and if she is ever anxious about him, she only shows it by making him take so much exercise in the open air. He fairly lives out of doors. She will not let him learn to read, although he is crazy to do it."

"She is right there," said Thorne. "No child, however robust, should know his alphabet under seven years of age."

"Maybe not. But if that were my boy, I couldn't resist the temptation to manufacture him into another—What's-his-name?"

"Infant phenomenon?" suggested Thorne, mischievously.

"No—although he *was* one. I mean that French prodigy

—the son of Count Somebody, or Marquis Something-else, who used to entertain his mother's grand company by chalking the map of France on the floor of the *salon*—rivers, towns, and all—and do sums in algebra, and talk Latin, and ask as well as answer metaphysical questions, when he was only six years old."

"He died young, I believe?"

"Why, yes—unfortunately. As I was saying, Miriam's soul is bound up in that child, and his in her. I often think that, hard as it seemed at the time, it was a blessed thing for him that his mother died while he was so young."

"His mother! Is he not Mrs. Hartley's child?"

"Hush! not so loud! It is a painful subject to the family. His father was Mrs. Hartley's only son. He died when Willie was less than a year old, and his wife outlived him but three months. No orphan ever had a better home. —There is a fresh batch of people, and Dr. Stanton is looking about for you. They are pouring in, fast and furious."

It was a heterogeneous assembly, but a harmonious one. Thorne played his part to the admiration of all; moving through the crowd the whole evening; holding familiar converse with the young; deferentially attentive to the aged; stopping, here and there, to speak in his frank, hearty way, to the children who were scattered about the rooms: and, at last, when Mrs. Hartley's incomparable supper had been discussed, the really fine amateur music that had diversified the converzatione, been duly enjoyed, and the small hours drew near—he, at Dr. Stanton's request, stepped into the doorway connecting the rooms, read a few verses of a psalm, and offered a brief prayer, every word of which was prompted by the scenes he had just passed through, and the happy, grateful realization that he dwelt, as father, shepherd, pastor, "among his own people."

CHAPTER V.

FRISK.

THERE was no one in the parlor when Thorne came down next morning; and, led by the merry music of girlish and childish laughter, he went out into the piazza. Dr. Stanton was there, seated in a garden-chair, watching the frolic going on in the broad carriage-road that swept, in a semi-circle, up to the porch-steps. The most conspicuous actor in the group was a gigantic Newfoundland dog, around whose body was buckled a miniature saddle, while a species of headstall was the terminus of a pair of gay silken reins. Willie was the Alexander of this tractable Bucephalus, and he sat his courser, with the pride of the kingly Macedonian boy. His curls clustered thickly beneath his straw hat, and formed a golden setting for the happy face upturned to Thorne, as he said, "Good-morning!"

"Mr. Thorne! will you just see what Milly has made for me!—a sure-enough saddle and bridle! Aren't they splendid?"

Thorne examined them, and declared them to be very beautiful.

"The whole equipage is a nonpareil in its way, rider included," he said to Miriam. "Yours was the design, not the workmanship of the paraphernalia, I suppose?"

"And she did it every stitch herself!" interrupted Willie, eagerly. "Please look, sir! It is *weal wed mowocco*!"

"Take care, Willie! you are dropping your *r's!*" smiled

Miriam. "He is apt, when excited, to relapse into baby *patois*—a mortifying accident, as you may suppose, to one of his mature years."

The irregular hours of the previous night had not affected her looks. She was fresh and gay as the May morning; clad in a pink cambric wrapper, belted at the waist by an elastic band, fastened with a gold buckle, and finished at throat and wrists by neat linen collar and cuffs. Her wide-brimmed hat had fallen back, and Thorne wondered that he had thought her, at his first view of her, the day before, almost if not quite plain. She had a radiant smile—one that seemed to color as well as illumine the countenance; and as she flashed it into Neale's eyes, in her harmless irony upon her juvenile playmate, he experienced a strange sensation—a sudden thrill: was it of admiration, or some inexplicable, arbitrary association of memory?

He could not determine then, for she replaced her hat, and saying, "We will go around the drive once more before prayers, Willie!" set off, half-running, her hand upon the dog's head, as he trotted beside her.

"Grandpapa!" she said, when Willie had dismounted, and Bruno's accoutrements were removed, "can I try Frisk to-day? Uncle Parker thinks that I can manage him."

"Parker's confidence in your horsemanship may make him too sanguine," rejoined Dr. Stanton. "Reuben says he is one of the most intractable animals he has ever broken to saddle or harness."

"Reuben!" Miriam's lip curled. "Dear grandpapa! Reuben is not the Centaur he was ten years ago. Age is making him timid or clumsy. I watched him Saturday, as he was exercising Frisk, and was vexed to see how his style of riding had altered. I wish you would let me make one trial, at least."

"I will speak to Parker, and have him ride the horse this morning under my own eye," said the indulgent grandparent—"will try him with the side-saddle and habit. If he behaves himself properly with Parker, you may mount him this afternoon."

"Thank you, sir! I have no fears of the result."

"I need not inquire whether you are fond of riding," observed Thorne, smiling.

"Oh! we Kentucky girls learn to ride by the time we can walk. I do not recollect when or how I acquired the art. There is a tradition to the effect that I took my initial lesson upon the back of a kicking mule, and was found by my terrified nurse clinging to the mane of the discourteous steed—but I cannot vouch for the truth of the story. Grandpapa! while I think of it—had not we better have our excursion while mamma takes her afternoon nap? I should be sorry to make her uneasy. And another friend of ours had best be inveigled into a temporary absence—an excursion to the grove, or some other quiet resort, suited to temperaments of the nervous-sympathetic order," she added, lowering her voice, and glancing at Willie, who was hanging about Bruno's neck, unaware of the plotting to secure his peace of mind.

"Kind-hearted, but alarmingly 'fast!'" ruminated Mr. Thorne, as they went in to prayers.

Frisk must have sustained Parker's trial tolerably well, for his trampling hoofs upon the gravel road under his window, recalled the morning's conversation to Thorne's mind, as he luxuriated in a post-prandial cigar and book in his chamber that afternoon. He had spent the earlier part of the day in the church-study; but the carpenters were busied there upon some trifling repairs, and he would not unpack his library in the midst of their din and dust. Dr. Stanton, with the rest of the household, supposed that he had re-

turned to Limestone, or he would have received an invitation to join the riding-party. This consisted of Miriam and her grandfather, but Reuben and Parker were in waiting, and two or three other black faces and woolly heads peeped around corners, or their owners sauntered about the yard, to witness the expected witching show of equestrianism.

Reuben had his partisans, as Parker had his, and the two chiefs of these factions were, according to their custom, diametrically opposed to each other, with respect to the propriety of trusting their young mistress upon the back of her new steed.

"Jest as if a Kentucky nigger didn't know more 'bout a Kentucky horse than one of yer smooth-tongued, smooth-handed Virginny 'colored gentlemen!'" Reuben had growled over his hoe-cake at dinner. "But I done said my say! I telled ole master dat colt weren't fit for him to back—let alone Miss Mir'um. And ef he chooses to listen to strangers' racket, and strangers what aint use' to handlin' nothin' with a harder mouth than a tea-kettle, and knows nothin' 'bout kickin' or rearin,' 'cept what's done by a dinin'-room cheer," —a scathing allusion to Parker's butlership—"why, 'taint none o' my business."

Parker had been standing by the kitchen fire, ostensibly busied in paring his nails, during this philippic.

"You've said one true thing at last!" he said, at this point, "It *isn't* none of your business, and I hope you'll b'ar that in mind, forever and hereafter. I don't say the horse am not gaily. None of the Hartleys ever 'descend to ride any *but* gaily horses. But I do declar that I never see a well-bred Virginny lady—let alone a Virginny *hostler*" —supremely disdainful—"who would be afeerd to back any thing that was managed as easy as I managed Frisk, this mornin'. And"—waxing dignifiedly severe—"if any gentleman, white or colored, mean to say—I don't say as

they *do* say—but if so be that they do mean and desire and pretend to say—that I haven't as much respect for my young mistis' neck as any of the Kentucky Stantons—why, all I've got to say to them as says that, is, my name is Parker Hartley, and the gentleman knows where to find me, if he's got any thing more to say!"

Thus it chanced that, as Frisk was led into the yard, so many eyes, besides those of the spectator at the window above, followed his movements. He was a blooded horse, not too large for a lady's use, and as Parker delighted to say—"the very picture of a nag." In color, a rich bay; with a broad, deep chest, slender limbs, compact body, small head, a neck whose arch was graceful as a swan's; his full eye glancing almost human intelligence upon those around him—he might well move Miriam to rapturous exclamation, and win the silent, but sincere approbation of a looker-on, who was a better judge of such things than herself. Yet Thorne forgot his momentary pleasure at sight of the animal, in excited suspense, as she prepared to mount. Holding her riding-skirt with one hand, she walked up to Frisk, and passed the other over his face, patting his forehead, and pausing a second at the dilating nostrils, talking cheerily and kindly; then, threading his mane with her fingers and stroking his glossy sides. The sagacious creature followed her with his eyes, turning his head from right to left, as she moved.

"Reuben! do you hold his head! Uncle Parker, will you stand on the other side of him as I get on? I have a fancy that he will swerve when I spring. Now, grandpapa! your hand, if you please!"

She had not misjudged his intentions. The instant he felt her grasp upon the pommel, there was a quick sway of the body outward, that would have occasioned a fall in an unguarded or unpractised rider.

"A little too soon to do any harm! was Miriam's comment, as she let go the saddle and stood erect. "Nearer! nearer! Uncle Parker! *Now!*"

Frisk, this time, nearly destroyed Parker's equilibrium by his start, but he was outwitted. Miriam was in her seat, bridle in hand, mistress of the introductory move, if no more. As Reuben released his head, the horse reared violently, and the negro, in his terror, caught at the reins.

"Don't touch him! stand back!" called out his young mistress, with a ring in her voice, that showed her spirit was fairly aroused.

Frisk reared again, and was restored to his quadrupedal level by a sharp pull upon the right rein—again—and a jerk upon the now unguarded left brought his fore-feet to the ground, with a yet severer shock. His next evolution was a slow waltz, which scattered the gravel in all directions within a radius of several yards. Without quitting her hold of the useful curb, his rider leaned forward, and stroked his proud neck, speaking in her clear, firm tones—such petting, as would have subdued any reasonable animal, and made a soft-hearted horse her willing slave for life. Frisk was not in a mood to be reasoned with or cajoled, and he made this manifest by abruptly changing his pirouette into a double-quick back step. It seemed to the startled by-standers, that Miriam must inevitably be thrown over his head by the first dart, and she was unsettled for an instant; then, bringing the strength of both hands to bear upon the curb, she backed him quite across the yard, turned him at the fence, and backed him up to the door again.

"Bravo!" said Thorne, in a suppressed tone. "He has had enough of that movement!"

"Well done, my child!" ejaculated Dr. Stanton, his voice betraying no more trepidation, but much greater pride than if Reuben were the rider. "Will he go now—do you think?"

Miriam was coaxing and caressing the horse, who pawed, and champed the bit, tossing his beautiful head up and down, defiantly disobedient to her command to go forward.

"He is only considering what to do next," she said, laughing.

The words were still upon her tongue, when Frisk published the result of his cogitations by rearing higher than before—poising himself in this attitude, his hoofs pawing the air above the rider's head. Reuben groaned, and Parker clasped his hands, with a low, affrighted exclamation. Miriam leaned over upon her horse's neck, and, not hesitating one second, doubled her gloved hand into a tight fist, and let him have it—a hard blow and well-planted—between his ears. The adroit expedient was successful. He pitched heavily, angrily forward, as she brought him down. Before she could tighten the rein she had relaxed, lest he should be drawn back upon her, he had got his nose between his knees, and lashed out viciously with his hind-feet.

"*That* I will not stand!" cried Miriam, emphatically.

In a twinkling she had his head as high as her own, and the whip, which had hung untouched until now, at her wrist, fell fast and heavily upon his shoulder. Unequivocally astounded at this new mode of treatment, Frisk backed, plunged, tried vainly to kick and rear, then dashed forward on the run. Obeying the impulse of the rein, at first mechanically, and more intelligently as his passion cooled, he went around and around the wide sweep of the carriage drive, gradually abating his speed as the steady, gentle tones of the rider gained his ear, until she drew him up, trembling and panting, but fairly conquered.

Doctor Stanton approached and patted his wet shoulders. Miriam's face beamed with triumph.

"I never had a more obstinate case!" she said, laughing. "Reuben was right about that! But I think we understand

one another now. Poor fellow," stroking his neck, "I am sorry you would not make friends without all this trouble to yourself."

"You should not have mounted if I had known how well he deserved his name," said her grandfather. "Once on, there were two alternatives—to conquer, or to give him up finally. I understand the stock. He would never have let you ride him again, if you had abandoned the attempt in this instance."

His own horse was now brought forward, and they rode together out of the yard, and down the road, Frisk going, like Agag, very delicately, and obviously conscious of the attendance of the bitter little enemy swinging so jauntily from his mistress' wrist.

"I tell *you*, she's got spunk!" uttered Reuben, all jealousies absorbed for once by a sense of overwhelming admiration.

"That's so!" responded Parker, amicably. "She's always been jest so fe'rless and determined. Maybe you don't remember the time she rode that wickedest of all wicked colts —that ar' sorrel, that killed hisself a jumpin' over the parstur' fence?"

"Dat was de year I lived with Mars' Henry, I reckon," said Reuben. "'Pears to me I *did* hear somethin' 'bout it."

"You see"—Parker took his rival by the button, as if they were brothers—"she warnt mor'n fifteen year old, and wild as a deer. So, one day, while she was a-wanderin' about the woods—she was always out doors—she come across Tim—he was hostler then—riding this Wildfire—there couldn't 'a been a better name for the creatur'. She ruled the place then, same as she does now, and she persuaded, or ordered, Tim to get down and let her get on. There was a man's saddle on the horse, but she didn't care for that. She had as lief 'a rode him bare-backed as any other way.

She got 'long 'sprisingly well till she was openin' the lower gate. That was when we worked more land than we do now, and there was a lane 'longside of the orchard yonder."

"I know!" nodded Reuben.

"Well! Wildfire took scare at a pig in the bushes, as he was comin' through the gate, and was off like a streak, before she could get a short, tight grip of the bridle. He couldn't sarcumvent her that way now, but she was nothing but a child then. Marster and Mistis and Mars' Willie Bent was all out in the front porch, and they see the horse come t'aring up the lane, and making straight for the open stable-door."

"Umph!" grunted the listeners, in true Eboe chorus.

"And Miss Mir'um, her hair a-flyin', and she a-clutchin' the reins, and settin' as straight as a dart and ridin' right on to her death, you may say. There aint no flinchin' in her! Mistis, she dropped in a dead faint, and Marster and Mars' Willie, they run toward the stable—Mars' Willie goin' like the wind—but bless you! what good would it do? Wildfire would get there long before them, and dash right in, and knock her brains out, maybe, for the door wasn't mor'n about seven feet high. And don't you think! she jest laid right flat upon the horse's back, and went through the door without e'er a scratch!"

"Dar! Hear dat, now!" ejaculated Reuben, in generous enthusiasm. "And nary scratch, you say?"

"Safe and sound, sir! for I was thar two minutes after she was, and Wildfire was in his stall, and she had thrown herself off, and was standing in the middle of the floor, kinder pale, and her eyes shinin' like stars, but laughin' for all that, at Mars' Willie, who was beggin' her to say she wasn't hurt. Marster took her up in his arms, when she met him at the stable-door, and held her as if he'd never let her go, and as

for Mars' Willie, he was white as a ghost, and so weak he couldn't stand."

"Ah! he set a deal o' store by her!" sighed one of the female auditors.

"There aint the like of her this side the Alleghanies!" returned Parker. "She's a Hartley, to the backbone."

"She is more like her grandpa." Reuben pricked up his ears at sound of the Shibboleth. "It stan's to reason she should favor them as has raised her, and not people she's never seed in her born days."

Peaceful counsels were at an end. The belligerents retired in the direction of their proper quarters, still battling in words, defensive and recriminative, until the muttering thunder died away upon Thorne's ear. His excitement, during the horseback scene, had been intense, and he listened to the dialogue that followed the heroine's departure, with interest and amazement.

"No sister of mine should ever imperil her neck by such freaks! It is fool-hardiness! a sinful risk of life and limb!" he said to himself. "I am surprised that Doctor Stanton does not prohibit these mad ventures. That horse of hers is not fit for any woman, even a Western girl, to ride. She managed him well, however! How ready and watchful she was! what a firm, elegant seat in the saddle, and strong, even hand upon the curb! Above all, she kept her temper —until he kicked. I did not blame her for flashing up then. A kicking horse is, to me, the greatest abomination that goes upon four legs. I recognized the justice of every blow after I had seen him let fly with his heels in that style. I should have relished breaking in Sir Frisk myself."

Which soliloquy, the reader will perceive, bears me out in the observation I made a few pages back concerning clergymen and horseflesh.

Mr. Thorne opened his desk and began a letter to his sister.

"LIMESTONE, *May 28th*, 18—.

"MY DEAR GERTRUDE—"

A picture passed between him and the page;—a horse dashing wildly up the lane, bearing a girlish figure—her tresses borne back by her breathless, onward rush through the air; lips compressed, and nostrils quivering, as he had seen them in her battle with the refractory steed, this afternoon, and her undaunted gaze fixed upon the open door, for her the yawning jaws of destruction. Then, the grandfather's close embrace and speechless gratitude for her preservation; the overpowering emotion of her youthful admirer, and her smile, contrasting so strangely with their agitation.

"A brave girl, and an intelligent! What a pity that strength and gentleness are so rarely combined in the same woman! With a little more softness, hers would be a charming character."

The fair inference from this clause would be, that the want of this softness prevented her from charming him, as she now was, and some other subject must therefore have superseded this in his reverie; for when Doctor Stanton and his granddaughter returned from their hour's ride, the letter lay still upon his desk, and these were the sole contents:

"LIMESTONE, *May 28th*, 18—.

"MY DEAR GERTRUDE—"

Mr. Thorne came down the front steps as Miriam rode up, and aiding her in alighting, congratulated her upon her signal victory.

"Who told you there had been a contest?"

"I witnessed it from my window."

"I thought you were at your study," she replied, with no pretty horror at having made an exhibition of her skill in his sight. "Do not misjudge my poor Frisk for his behavior to-day. It took us all by surprise, and his conduct since has

been unexceptionable. We had a brother of his here, some years since, and he was never subdued until grandpapa, in opposition to every body's advice, administered a severe flagellation. In this respect all of the stock resemble

'The woman, the dog, and the hickory tree'—

You recollect the rhyme—

'The more you beat them the better they be.'

But once won, by beating or otherwise, they are true always."

"Who are 'they?' Frisk and his relatives, or the noble triumvirate immortalized in your couplet?" asked Thorne.

"I referred to the Frisk tribe, but the remark may hold true concerning two out of the trio mentioned. The attachment of the beaten spaniel is proverbial; and there are certainly many women whose love, like the white clover, blooms most luxuriantly when trampled upon."

A scream of hysterical delight interrupted her. Willie ran across the piazza, white with alarm, and out of breath with exertion—threw himself into her arms, and sobbed convulsively. Miriam sat down upon the steps, and folded him to her breast.

"My boy! Milly's darling! what has frightened you?"

Her composition lacked "softness," yet the utterance of the fondest mother could not have been more sweet, more tender. She had to question several times, before the child was able to articulate.

"Tom told me that you were gone to break your neck, and would be brought home on a plank!"

Miriam bit her lips to keep from laughing, and shook her head at Thorne, who was nearly overcome by this tragi-comic burst.

"But you see that my neck is all sound—that there is not

a crack in it. Tom was a naughty boy, to tell you such a story."

"No! he didn't mean to say what wasn't true!" Willie choked down his sobs, that he might vindicate his playfellow. "He heard Uncle Reuben say so to Aunt Sally, and he came down to the grove to tell me. So I ran home as fast as I could, to see!"

There was a gleam in Miriam's eye, that boded no good to Reuben's imprudent tongue; but her accents were gently soothing, as before.

"Willie dear, did you think that grandpapa would let me ride a horse that would break my neck? or, that I would kill myself and leave you? or—"

She murmured the rest in his ear. Thorne walked to the other end of the porch, to avoid the appearance of intrusion upon their confidential talk, but not until he had seen the upward glance of the tear-laden eyes, and divined that the sentence, inaudible to him, was an appeal to the boy's faith in a heavenly Parent's care.

"He is a child of uncommon sensibility," observed Neale to Dr. Stanton, after supper.

Willie was very silent, and could not be enticed to eat at this meal. His countenance wore an expression of dreamy pensiveness; his eyes scarcely left Miriam's face for a moment, except when he was spoken to; and Thorne noticed that she sat, most of the time, with his hand clasped in hers, upon or under the table. She was unusually cheerful, even for her, gay and talkative, often turning the conversation to topics which Willie could appreciate, glancing furtively at him to see whether he were entertained by what was going on.

"He is too sensitive—far too thoughtful and impressible for his health and happiness," rejoined the Doctor. "His affections are powerful and his sympathies lively. These, joined to an active mind and delicate physical organization,

make one tremble for his welfare in life. He requires very peculiar management. If transferred to ignorant or injudicious hands, he would not live a year. As it is, we hope to rear him, and that he may become, not only a healthy, but a good and happy man."

Thorne would have inquired whether this peculiarity of constitution were referable to any hereditary weakness or early sickness, but the remembrance of Mrs. Fry's caution checked him just in time.

The Doctor's round of visits was rarely over before nine or ten o'clock in the evening; and as he left the house to accomplish this unfinished duty, Neale started up to his room, with a remorseful and rather ashamed thought of his incomplete letter. The spacious entrance-hall upon the first floor had its counterpart above, leading through a glass door into the upper piazza. This was open, the night being warm, and he stepped out upon the piazza to inhale the scented breeze from the flower-garden, and note the effect of the lights twinkling in the houses of the town. There was still a lingering glow of the rosy twilight in the western sky, and against this faintly-illuminated background he could see the square tower, and the taper steeple rising between its four pinnacles—the one object in all the landscape to which his heart already turned with love and interest. There was the monument to remind him that his life's work was already begun; the silent monitor pointing to the home, the goal, where alone he could ever say, "My work is done!" The lines of his ministry were cast in pleasant places; but whose glory would be promoted by his labors in this goodly heritage? Every thought was a prayer, as he stood there under the starry heavens, and overlooked the homes that were to be his harvest-field. Oh, with what diligence, what watchings, what tears, ought he to go forth, bearing the precious seed!

Wrapped in these meditations, he had not heard the murmur of voices within a room whose windows opened upon the portico. His attention was aroused by a strain of music, clear but not loud. He was not opposite the chamber from which the melody issued; but upon the curtain of the window nearest the glass door was projected a shadow, moving slowly back and forth, which fancy easily discerned to be a figure rocking a child to sleep in its arms.

The words of the hymn were so distinctly enunciated, and the night was so still, that he did not lose one.

"Soft the dews of evening fall,
Twilight, with its friendly pall
Folds about Earth's beating heart,
Bids the weary day depart.
Through the cool and darkling air,
Father! we raise our evening prayer.

"All the long, bright, busy day,
Toil has worn our strength away;
With trembling limbs and furrowed brow,
At the mercy-seat we bow.
Thou canst lift each weight of care,
Our Father! hear our evening prayer!

"We are faint! Temptations strong,
In a vast and rapid throng,
Oft our sinking souls assail—
Thou Mighty! let them not prevail!
Be Thou our guard in every snare—
Our Father! hear our evening prayer!

"Keep us till morn's rosy gleams
Waken us from happy dreams;
Give us daily strength and peace,
Till Life's days and nights shall cease—
Then—Thy final rest to share—
Our Father! hear our evening prayer!"

Neale listened with stilled breath, until the last fervent tone melted into silence, and, as the songstress arose to lay her motionless burden upon the bed, he sought his chamber. The letter was resolutely continued, but he wrote, with the plaintive cadences of the evening hymn rising and falling upon the ears of his imagination. His epistles to this his only single sister, and the one whose age most nearly approached his own, were generally full and confidential, and to-night he had much to tell. He described the scenes of the Sabbath, not forgetting his meeting with Mrs. Fry; Monday's dinner with the church officials, and the evening reception; then came, in due order, his home and its inmates.

"To picture Dr. Stanton, call up the image of your beau-ideal Kentuckian. Hale and active as most other men are at forty-five; frank and courteous; with a mind and heart whose original excellence has been brought to higher degrees of perfection by cultivation; he is a just and generous neighbor; a fond father; a kind master, and, to your unworthy brother, dear Gertrude, the hospitable host; the sympathizing friend; the safe counsellor. I see you smile at my enthusiasm, but I have written naught save the sober truth.

"Mrs. Hartley, his widowed daughter, is a lovely woman still, although one can see that she has known many and heavy sorrows. Her demeanor to me sometimes brings the tears to my eyes—for it is *motherly*. Need I say what care and fondness—what love until death, that word recalls? Then, there are little Willie, a beautiful child, four or five years of age, the pet of the household, and Miss Hartley—"

A dead stop. What epithet—what brace, trio, or quartette of epithets could convey his various and contradictory impressions of her of whom this name was the representative—kept, was it accidentally? until the rest of the family

were dismissed? Should he say that she interested him more than any other woman he had ever seen, without being able to define what was the attraction in mind, manner or person, that led him to study her every movement? There was no one look, act or remark of hers, which conveyed a just and full idea of her character.

"Character! as if I could say any thing of the real character of one whom I have not known three days! Because, she rides well and sings well, must she consequently be a cabalistic volume, worthy of long and close study?"

He seized his pen, and dashed off a single line, in which his sister saw nothing more than met the eye;—"Miss Hartley, an intelligent young lady, rather singular in some respects, but quite pleasant."

"Very awkward and unsatisfactory!" he said, reading it over; "but Gertrude will know no better."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAYOR'S DAUGHTER.

"Mr., Mrs. and Miss Lewis have called to see you, Mr. Thorne," said Parker, ceremoniously.

The letter was just finished, and Thorne waited to fold and direct it, before going below. When he appeared in the parlor, Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Hartley were talking together, while Miriam entertained Mr. Lewis and his daughter. The *pater familias* was an important civic functionary, being no less a personage than the Mayor of Limestone. He was of a portly, rotund figure, with short limbs, and, being apparelled in his favorite summer costume of white waistcoat and neckcloth, black coat and pantaloons, bore a humiliating resemblance to a penguin, as he waddled across the floor to meet Mr. Thorne.

"Most happy to see you, my dear sir!" he said, squeezing that gentleman's hand with both his fat claws. Neale actually glanced down to see whether they were web-footed —they felt so cold and flabby. "My daughter, Miss Lewis, the Rev. Mr. Thorne—my dear! we are—ah—charmed to have you as one of us, I am sure, sir!"

Neale did not know whether to smile or be vexed, as he saw the flash of fun that shot over Miriam's face, at this queer appendix to the paternal introduction; but he controlled both impulses, and bowing politely to the young lady, turned toward the quiet person in brown who sat by the mistress of the house.

"Mrs. Lewis—Mr. Thorne!" said Mrs. Hartley, with her gentle grace.

It was like Neale Thorne to select a seat by the wife, whose presence her husband had overlooked, instead of one by him, or his daughter.

"I think I have not had the pleasure of meeting you before, Mrs. Lewis," he said, as respectfully as though she were the incarnation of womanly beauty and intellectuality.

"No, sir—we've been away—"

"We regretted extremely—ah—the necessity that called us from the city last week, sir, and detained us over Sabbath, causing us moreover to miss your—ah—delightful *soirée* last evening, Mrs. Hartley," interposed the Mayor, in his deep, rumbling voice, that sounded as if it rolled upward out of a cask. "Yet it was a—ah—convivial occasion that caused our absence, being the marriage of my eldest son to a daughter of the Honorable Daniel Bridgford. You have heard of the gentleman, I presume, sir?"

Thorne answered in the affirmative.

"*The* politician of the day, sir! I was never—ah—more impressed with the man's power than during our recent visit."

The Mayor settled himself back in his arm-chair, joined the tips of his fingers carefully together, and was "in" for a comfortable monologue.

"We had very many—ah—weighty dissertations upon the state of the nation, sir, and I am happy to be able to state that it was my—ah—privilege to make certain representations to the honorable gentleman which he was—ah—pleased to assure me had opened his eyes to the existence and importance of certain abuses on the part of—ah—certain parties in power, which ought—ah—undeniably to be corrected. But this by the way! I was remarking, Mr. Thorne, that we were sorry to miss your—ah—able and

eloquent discourses on the Sabbath, and grieved, likewise, that ours was, as I have been informed, the only—ah—leading family in the congregation, which was not represented in the—ah—social assembly of last evening. In fact, we did not return home until ten o'clock this morning, and have—ah—embraced the earliest possible opportunity of calling upon you."

"You are very kind, sir!" Thorne broke desperately into the "linked *dulness*, long drawn out." Then, to Mrs. Lewis—"Was your journey a tedious one, madam?"

"Not more'n thirty mile—"

"Thirty-two miles, Mr. Thorne—thirty-two miles, and a fraction, sir! We—ah—accomplished a portion of it yesterday, however, stopping over night with a friend of mine—Mr. Symmes, a lawyer of—ah—distinction, in the adjoining county—a man of wealth and—ah—influence, sir, who will make his mark on the age, if this corrupt and—ah—nefarious administration does not swamp the country, before he has an opportunity to attempt its—ah—redemption."

"Please, pa! spare us politics for one evening, at least!" entreated Miss Lewis, pouting her rosy lips. "I, for one, had a surfeit of them at Colonel Bridgford's. There were three members of the legislature, two Congressmen, and, I don't know how many lawyers there," she pursued to Miriam. "And you can't think how terribly wearisome it was to hear them argue!"

"I can readily imagine that it was excessively tiresome," replied Miriam. "Did not the ladies complain of so much professional conversation?"

"Well—yes!" Miss Lewis had evidently not expected to be believed so literally. In her desire to flourish the titles of the distinguished guests of her brother's father-in-law, and her familiarity with grand society, she had gone a little too far. "Well—yes! but, then, they were such de-

lightful men—so full of life and humor, that one could not find fault with them."

All men—and women—have their hobbies. You and I are not exceptions to this rule, my reader, even though the one we mount be that most insidious and pernicious of the race—the carping, cavilling, sneering propensity to pry out, drive into the open field, and ride down our neighbor's hobbies. The Lewis hobby-horse was an insane ambition after, and vanity in a position to which they had never really attained. And inconsistent as it may appear, when taken together with their neglect of the unpretending individual who murdered Lindley Murray's English in every sentence —the only unkind thing she ever did, however—who had, long ago, sunk to the station of an upper servant in her home, and who looked, beside her husband and children, like a meek domestic wren, consorting with peacocks—it was to Mrs. Lewis's branch of the family that they were indebted for their aristocratic *prestige*. Her father was one of the earlier settlers of the state; had served it in the legislature for two terms; had run for Congress, and been badly beaten. After this disaster he withdrew to the shades of private life, and the solace of a long-tried friend—or enemy, as his judgment or that of his neighbors may be taken—the bottle. He lived but three years after his defeat, but managed, in that time, to swallow the inconsiderable remainder which politics had left him, of a once handsome estate, and to make his wife and children beggars. The third daughter bestowed herself and her poverty upon an industrious young boatman, who was at that time plying his craft up and down the Ohio river. Ten years later, he sold out the business and good-will; came to the promising town of Limestone, and opened a commission and storage establishment.

Quaintly and truly says the old adage: "Whoso reacheth

eagerly after a gown of cloth-of-gold, shall hardly fail to seize one of the sleeves." Caleb Lewis believed, and held for certain, that there was no office in the gift of the people too high for his merits. He would have accepted, without misgivings, the nomination for the Presidency, had it been offered him; he marvelled, wrathfully, that such men as Clay and Crittenden were sent to Washington, while he stayed at home. After a weary season of fruitless grasping and impatient waiting, he succeeded, by spending enough money, to purchase a literal robe of golden tissue, in seizing his sleeve of the metaphorical garment, in the shape of the mayoralty of Limestone. Virtuously respectable citizens were confounded at the result of the election, and "never could understand how it was done," while those who could have told the any thing but straight story of log-rolling, wire-pulling, and political expedients yet more shameless, were discreetly silent. But Mayor he was, and Mayor he had remained for five years, and for four of these Miss Letitia Lewis had tried to lead "society" in Limestone, successfully, according to her ideas, while others laughed at, and humored the notion. She was essentially commonplace in mind and character; fond of dress, beaux and gossip—most fond of herself.

Her errand to-night was to see the new preacher, to have him see her, and then to judge for herself of his capabilities for shining at her parties, and for the ulterior purposes of flirtation. Half of the eligible unmarried men of the town were danglers in her train, and she had grown to believe her attractions irresistible. Miriam Hartley she regarded with good-natured indifference, tinged with contempt for a girl who might make a figure in society by her accomplishments and prospective wealth, yet who went abroad so little, and preferred her books and home-circle to the enjoyments common to young ladies of her age and set. She

often remonstrated with her misguided schoolmate upon the folly and danger of her course, ending, as she showed it must do, in irremediable singlehood, and if Miriam had allowed it, Letitia would have brought her out at the Mayor's mansion, and in her own style. Since this charitable design was frustrated by her refractory protegée, Miss Lewis contented her benevolent soul by patronizing "that dear, strange creature, Miriam Hartley—the kindest-hearted being alive, when one once knows her—but somewhat disposed to be masculine, and decidedly blue." Knowing all the while—sweet, generous soul! that this adjective of color would frighten away the probable and possible admirers of Dr. Stanton's heiress, more effectually than a report of small-pox or yellow fever could do. There is a vast deal of such laudation of dear friends done among the gentler sex every day.

Miss Letitia was in her best looks this evening, wearing a pearl-colored silk, and lace cape, through which her snowy shoulders showed to great advantage, while a half-wreath of white roses drooped from the back of her head. She was a blonde, with light-blue orbs; fair hair, and a brilliant complexion—one of those pretty girls who make up into beauties, for ten or fifteen years, then, wither into yellow-skinned old women. She sat coquettishly upon a low stool at Miriam's side, her hand sparkling with rings, laid upon Miss Hartley's lap; blooming and *riante*, and set off well—but of course, she never suspected that! by Miriam's colorless cheek and repose of manner.

Having silenced her father, temporarily, and run over her list of great men to the company in general, she began, with affected shyness, a dialogue with Mr. Thorne—an occasional blush and an interesting stammer introduced here and there, to testify the depth of her respect for him and his office. He replied politely, and not reluctantly. He had an eye

for coloring, feature, and attitude, and Miss Lewis, besides being a comely picture, was more agreeable in uttering her nonentities and platitudes than the heavy boredom of her father. Miriam seemed satisfied that the conversation in this part of the room should be confined to these two, for she presently slipped away from the weight of the jewelled hand, and seated herself near the Mayor. Miss Lewis found her latest acquaintance very entertaining, and, thanks to his speedy gauge of her comprehension, he never led her beyond her depth. How long he would have swum patiently in these shoals was not now to be tested. Many men as wise, and with tastes as cultivated, deliberately confine themselves to such shallow waters for life—but "this by the way"—to use our Mayor's apology for digression.

The interruption to the present arrangement of the company was the arrival of Dr. Stanton and two younger gentleman—Messrs. Johnson and Niles, who had called to pay their respects to Mr. Thorne. Dr. Stanton engaged the Mayor; Mr. Johnson took a chair in the immediate neighborhood of Mr. Thorne and Miss Lewis; Miriam, perceiving that Mr. Niles sat, by accident, a little aloof from the rest, crossed the room and seated herself on the same sofa with him. By and by Neale joined himself to this pair. Mr. Niles was apparently five-and-twenty, gentlemanly and sensible; but Thorne would not have remembered him with especial interest, had it not been for the conversation that followed his departure and that of his friend.

The door was hardly shut behind them when Letitia exclaimed, half laughingly—"Is Mr. Niles a visitor of yours, Miriam?"

"Not a frequent, but always a welcome visitor," was the reply.

"You don't mean it!"

"Why should I not?"

"Now—why will you force me to publish scandal, you wicked girl! and before Mr. Thorne, too! He will think me a regular slanderer," said Letitia, casting her eyes up at the dreaded critic, and blushing bewitchingly.

"If there is any scandal in the case, you had better reserve your communication until a more fitting occasion," rejoined Miriam.

"I negative that!" said Dr. Stanton. "Robert Niles has a high place in my esteem. If there are allegations affecting his moral worth, you will oblige me by setting them forth, Miss Letitia."

Letitia looked almost frightened. "Oh! I never meant any thing so serious as that! He is a steady, good young man, I don't doubt; but we have never felt that it was exactly the thing to receive him, on a footing of equality, on account of his origin. That is all."

"In common with the rest of us, he had one ancestor—a gardener—whose loss of place was fraught with serious consequences to his posterity," remarked Miriam, dryly.

Dr. Stanton and Thorne laughed. Letitia seemed puzzled, but laughed also, without seeing the point of the jest.

"But you know who his mother is—don't you? That dried-up old woman who sits under the gallery in our church, and who used to take in washing. Many and many is the basket of clothes this son has carried back and forth for her on Saturday nights."

"That speaks well for his filial regard," observed Miriam. "I have always heard that he was one of the best of sons."

"Yes," said Dr. Stanton, approvingly. "We will remember this one thing in his favor. Now for the discreditable part of his history, Miss Letitia."

"That is the worst I know of him," responded that young lady, slightly mortified. "For my part, I have too much old blood in my veins to relish intercourse with these very new

men. I know that kind of democracy is fashionable now-a-days, but I cannot fall into it easily."

"It is difficult to avoid the custom of considering all respectable citizens as free and equal, in a comparatively young state, like ours," replied Dr. Stanton, addressing the Mayor and Thorne. "It is our boast that our aristocracy is such as may be earned—not bought or inherited—and that the means of winning its honors are intellect and energy."

"The only true nobility in this country—and the best in any land," exclaimed Thorne. "It is the strength and glory of our free institutions that this is so."

The Mayor looked wondrous wise, and unclosed his lips, but Letitia was before him.

"I see that I am in a woful minority! And, of course, I confess that you all are right, and that it is all prejudice on my part; but I cannot persuade myself into the idea that the old washerwoman's son can ever become a gentleman. It is a pity he has gone into business here. He ought to have removed to a strange place, where nobody ever heard of his parentage."

Neale was looking at Miriam, and saw a singular change pass over her face—a dark shade of displeasure, or unpleasant memories. Her fingers were crimping the folds of Mrs. Lewis's shawl, which lay across the arm of the sofa, and suddenly compressed them, as with a vice. Still, she did not look up or speak. She had a way of keeping her eyes cast down upon the floor, or her lap, when she was a mere listener to a conversation.

"And abandoned his mother?" asked Dr. Stanton, in gentle reproof.

"Why, no! he could have done as much for her if he were a hundred miles away, as he does here. He has bought her a very nice house, and she has left her old profession."

"But he lives with her, and his society is her greatest earthly comfort. Would it not be cruel to separate them?"

Letitia was thoroughly aware that hers was the unpopular side of the question, and that she was doing herself no credit by persistence in its defence; but there was no retreat without yielding the principles upon which she based her social importance. She was fretted with Dr. Stanton for differing with her; with her father, for not coming to her relief; with Mr. Thorne, for the silence made expressive by his speaking eye;—but she was most annoyed with Miriam —partly because she had espoused the opposite side of the case from herself—chiefly because she was a woman; and there is a natural aptitude among what Martin Yorke denominates "womenites," to wage war upon those of their own gender in preference to encountering a masculine opponent. It was rude in Dr. Stanton to disagree with her, and to press the point, as he did, by question and argument; in Miriam, half this show of opposition was both rude and *mean!* "She wanted to 'show off' before the minister, to establish her reputation with him as a democratic saint, while *she*—Letitia—was a proud upstart sinner!" Such thoughts may seem incompatible with the disposition of an unintellectual, good-humored young lady—for of the two girls, Letitia was reputed to be the more amiable. The woman of strong mind and deep heart can be—perhaps often is, passionate, while pettishness is generally confined to the butter-and-sugar mouthed "angels in the house," who "cannot argue," but are eternally "feeling" much more than is wholesome for themselves or their husbands. Cœlebs can take his choice—the thunder-gust that clears the air, and leaves a cloudless sky for, it may be, weeks afterward, or the continual dropping of many a misty day.

Letitia felt that she was ill used, and what more just than

to spite Miriam in return? She laughed—a favorite way of preluding an attack, with your "amiable" woman.

"I had no idea that I was getting myself into such a scrape—that Mr. Niles had so many warm defenders here," she said, facing Miriam. "Have I done any mischef, Miriam dear? I thought I knew how the land lay with you well enough to venture to speak freely of any gentleman who is a *resident* of Limestone. I begin to fear that I have made a sad blunder. How is it?"

"I know no reason why you should hesitate, on my account, to express your opinion of any gentleman, let him be either an inhabitant or a non-resident of Limestone," replied Miriam, with perfect composure. "If that is what you call a blunder, you have committed none."

"Miriam! Miriam!" Letitia shook her head archly. "Do you remember saying to me once, in your solemn way, 'Letitia, most equivocations are falsehoods'? But we will pass this over. I want you to answer honestly what I am going to ask. If Mr. Niles were addressing you—don't let your eyes blaze so furiously, my dear! I am only supposing a case—if Mr. Niles were addressing you, and you liked him well enough to marry him, would not the thought of his mother's wash-tub, and the odor of soapsuds, be sufficient to cause you to discard him?"

"As I am Miriam Hartley, and he Robert Niles, I am not prepared to say what I would do. But if Mr. A. were to propose to Miss B., in similar circumstances, I should reply that she did not deserve the compliment he paid her by his preference, if she rejected the man of her heart for a reason so unworthy of any sensible woman."

"But would not Miss B. prefer that he should offer her, instead, a pleasant home in another state, where the scrubbing-board and soap were things unknown; where he could hold up his head with the best men in the community, and

she be spared the mortification of introducing Mother A. to her refined visitors? I declare, the idea of associating with such low people ought to prevent any well-bred girl from receiving Mr. Niles's attentions, even should they mean nothing."

"That depends upon your definition of good breeding." Miriam dropped the shawl, and prepared herself to end this nonsense, which all present, excepting Miss Letitia, began to feel was in wretched taste, to say no more. "As I read Life and Duty, no one whose breeding is thorough, and whose self-respect is untainted by a lurking consciousness of his own inferiority, need fear the consequences of such association with the unlearned and inelegant as Providence may render unavoidable and expedient."

"That is—ah—going very far, Miss Miriam," said the Mayor, lumberingly. "Self-preservation is the—ah—prime law of Nature; and if we wish our households and communities to remain pure, we must fence them in by all—ah—reasonable precautions. In my profession I see many instances of the pernicious results of—ah—evil companionships. This—ah—well—ah—agrarianism does not work well in our land, and in this enlightened generation."

Here he gave a sonorous snort, and looked around for the applause of the court.

A bright spot flickered upon Miriam's cheek, and she seemed to pause to steady her voice, before she trusted herself to reply.

"You misunderstood me, Mr. Lewis. I did not speak of the vice or infamy that eats, like certain acids, into the finest gold. From every influence of this nature I would guard families and communities as sedulously as would you. I suppose that, in this sense, no sane person doubts that 'evil communications corrupt good' morals, as well as 'good manners.'"

"I certainly interpreted your doctrine as Pa did," said Miss Letitia, pertly. "Will you please tell us what you *did* mean, my dear? As the children say, 'Say it again, and say it slow.'"

Again Miriam hesitated, to gather self-command, but it was less perfect than before. The mettled spirit was becoming chafed.

"I intended to say just this—not as a dogma, but as my individual opinion: in my belief, ninety-nine parts out of a hundred of the supercilious horror of 'vulgarity' evinced by those who consider fastidiousness an evidence of refinement, is nothing more nor less than a knowledge of certain latent affinities within themselves that may develop into amalgamation with the qualities they profess to despise."

She paused for a moment, then went on more gently: "Else, why dread contamination from contact with the 'lower classes'? Is the temper of really good steel injured by the breath, that passes directly from its surface? My servant may learn much from my teachings: shall I fear to impart them, lest I should sink to his level? Is a king any less a king, when he uncovers his head to one of his subjects? Did the Son of Man resign His Divinity, when He girded Himself with a towel, and washed His disciples' feet?"

"Hear! hear!" cried Letitia, mockingly. "As I have always told you, Miriam, you ought to have been a man and an orator. I don't wonder that all the gentlemen, and most of the girls, are afraid of you. You have demolished poor little me, by your combination of science, politics, and religion. Pa! ma! it is high time we were going home. Pa, I hope you have taken notes of the lecture. The next time a man is brought into your court charged with murder or burglary, Miriam's precepts may be of service to you."

"I hope that I never shall defeat the ends of justice, Mr. Lewis," rejoined Miriam, with heightened color and forced pleasantry.

The Mayor elevated his double chin, and trusted that his "sense of the—ah—momentous responsibilities of his office would—ah—preclude the intrusion of any private sentiment upon his—ah—discharge of a public duty."

"Still, it would be a consolation to condemned criminals to know that their families would be none the less respected for their guilt and its punishment; that they needn't fly the country because their parents were disgraced," said Letitia, tying on a fanciful rigolette, all fringe and balls; looking prettier than ever, and, if possible, more amiable. "You are a dear, clever girl, Milly! I wish I could ever hope to have one-tenth of your goodness and sense. Good-night, my darling! Kiss me, to show that you are not very angry with poor, silly little Letty!"

Miriam suffered the salute, but Thorne saw her rub her lips with her handkerchief the instant after.

"Good night, Doctor! You are too gallant to triumph in your victory over a weak girl. Good night, Mrs. Hartley! It is a shame that we have kept you up so late; but we never know when to leave your house. Mr. Thorne, you will be more charitable in your judgment of me, when you know me better."

Neale bowed, and tried not to look too incredulous—a futile attempt of expiring politeness, while his face was so grave, and his eye so eloquent of contemptuous rebuke. He was a miserable hypocrite when he did essay dissimulation, as was proved by Mrs. Lewis saying, distressfully—

"He isn't sure of that, Letty—nor I, neither! I must say, that I am right down ashamed of you!"

But Letty had frisked out of the room, and the Mayor put his wife aside, in his lordly way, to reiterate his pompous

invitation to Mr. Thorne to consider his house, and all that it contained, as his own.

"For, although not a communicant myself, I can assure you, my dear sir, that my—ah—respect for the gospel and its—ah—estimable and distinguished apostles is—ah—profound!"

"If the gospel does not come into high repute now, no amount of mortal patronage can make it respectable," Neale could not help saying, as he and Dr. Stanton returned to the parlor, having seen the guests to their carriage.

The Doctor smiled, as did Mrs. Hartley, but no further remark was made upon this, or any other subject. By a gesture, Dr. Stanton requested Thorne to lead the evening worship, after which the good-nights were briefly spoken.

Mrs. Hartley left the parlor in advance of Neale, and he had reached the first landing of the staircase, when he recollected his intention of taking a ride on horseback, before breakfast, the next morning, and turned back to request his host to have him awakened in season for the excursion. He unclosed the parlor door noiselessly. The lamp was extinguished, but there was a light in the study. As Thorne entered the outer room, he was arrested in his purpose by seeing, through the open door of the inner, Miriam throw herself upon her grandfather's neck, with a bitter, passionate cry—

"Oh, Grandpapa! will they never, *never* let us forget!"

CHAPTER VII.

PUBLICANS AND SINNERS.

DURING the two months succeeding his installation, Thorne made sure and rapid progress in the affections and confidence of his people. The generally pleasant, sometimes heavy, always important duty of pastoral visitation, was discharged with zeal and interest. No physician ever studied more diligently the constitution of a patient, than did our tyro pastor the general characteristics and individual peculiarities of the body to which he was called to minister. The result of the examination was, on the whole, highly encouraging. If there were a deficiency, especially among the country members of his charge, of that external polish of manner, and the divers appliances of luxury and taste which he had been accustomed to see further east and north, he found in their stead a frank heartiness of speech, joined to a liberal hand and cordial hospitality, the attainment and appreciation of solid comfort, without ostentation, that suited him far better. He grew daily to know and love more those he had elected friends within a few days after his coming. At Dr. Stanton's he was completely and happily at home, although he spent but a small portion of each day there, most of his time being taken up by studying and visiting. It was not easy to pass Mr. Fry's door without calling, if only for a minute; for, with all her flightiness, the little lady of the mansion was a warm friend—the impersonation of kindness—an amusing conversationalist, and

it was pleasant to talk with any one who knew his sisters. The correspondence between Gertrude Thorne and her old schoolfellow was reopened by the latter, and there was already a negotiation in train to bring about a visit from Miss Thorne in the fall.

Thorne was on his way to the study one morning, early in August, when, as he reached the Frys' gate, he saw Mrs. Fanny run out into the porch and beckon with a letter. He dismounted, tied his horse, and went in. She met him on the lower step of the piazza.

"Don't you think, I have had a letter from Gertrude, and she promises to be with me in September. She can't come before, because—— but I suppose you know that you are an uncle, again?"

"Oh, yes!" smiled Neale. "I received a dispatch to that effect, several days ago."

"And never said a word to me about it?"

"I forgot to mention it, if I must be candid. I have seen so little of you lately, and have not happened to think of it when we did meet. It is not such a novel occurrence, you must remember, as it was before I was uncle to four nieces and three nephews."

"But the newest is your name-child—so Gertrude says. Sit down in that chair, and read the letter! It would be an insult to ask you to come in-doors, when it is so delightful out here."

Neale looked really pleased at the thought of his namesake, and touched, no less than gratified, when he read his sister's announcement of the hearty endorsement of the appellation by all the family.

"Mary has one son besides this new arrival," wrote Miss Thorne, "and he bears the united names of his father and ours. Therefore, upon the motion of your humble correspondent, which proposition was carried by acclamation, we

have dubbed our youngest hope 'Neale Thorne,' after our dearest and best of brothers. May he be the pride and comfort of his mother and sisters, as our Neale has been of his! My love to the dear fellow when you see him. I must always love you for your goodness to him—'a stranger in a strange land.'"

"That is all 'soft sawder,' as Sam Slick would say—you comprehend," said Mrs. Fry, seeing that he was reading this sentence. "What she says of me, I mean. No doubt her praises of you are sincere. But we have done nothing for you. I would have lionized you to my heart's content, but Hugh wouldn't let me. He says that I must not appear to monopolize you, for fear of exciting jealousy in the church. That is the reason I never stop to speak to you now, on Sabbath or on lecture nights. If I had ever doubted the doctrine of providential arrangement of marriages, before I was Hugh Fry's wife, I could not have remained infidel afterward. What would become of me if he were not blessed with a superabundant supply of caution—enough for both of us? I am glad we live so far out of town, else I should not have dared to call you in this morning. How well you are looking! Our climate agrees with you. And that reminds me! Hugh says you are a capital shot, and that you won golden opinions from the whole party last week; that you camped out like a veteran, and tramped your fifteen miles a-day, with the vigor of a Leather-Stocking."

"Who is getting his share, and more than his share, of 'soft sawder' now?" asked Thorne, rising.

"Sit down, please! It is the truth, and you shouldn't be ashamed to hear it. The point I was aiming at was not to tickle or disgust your ears by reciting compliments of my own or my husband's manufacture, to you. You remember two gentlemen of your party, named Lee and Mendam?"

"I do, certainly."

"They have not crossed the threshold of a church in six years, until last Sabbath, and while they are, in the common acceptation of the term, respectable citizens—men of standing and education—their wild, irreligious talk has been productive of much evil to the young men of our town. We are a reckless set at the best, and require all the restraints of divine as well as human laws to keep us within the bounds of civilized and Christian behavior. Well, when these two scapegraces heard that you were to be one of the hunting-party, they were excessively annoyed, and vowed flatly that they would never join any such 'priest-ridden crowd.' But finding the others indifferent as to their company, and resolved to secure yours, they decided to go. Lee, who was the ruling spirit of the pair, called to see Hugh last evening, after service. We had espied them both in church, in the morning, hidden in a corner of the gallery, as if they feared to be seen—and wondered what was in the wind. It seems you won them fairly over during the four days you spent together—first, by your shooting; then, by your merry, social chat in the evenings; and lastly, by your moral courage, in conducting prayers in the midst of the company, every night and morning. The first night they would have stolen away, they said, had they suspected that such a service was intended; but Mr. Lee happened to be sitting close by you when the proposal was made to retire to your blankets, and you said, so pleasantly, that he never dreamed what was coming—'I suppose that we all agree as to the propriety of commending ourselves, before we sleep, to the Father, whose care is over us in the wilderness and by the camp-fire as truly as in our homes,' and immediately arose to offer prayer.

"He could not move without disturbing you, and he 'was loath,' to use his own words, 'to insult so good a fellow.' The next night Hugh asked you to preface the prayer

by a hymn, and they loitered near through curiosity—for they had heard, it seems, that you were a musician. You may recollect the hymn you chose?"

"It was 'Rock of Ages.' Nearly every one joined in the singing."

"Yes; but you led, and you never preached better!" The black eyes were glittering with moisture. "Said Mr. Lee to Hugh, 'We determined, privately, that a man who could handle a gun as he did; could tell such stories and laugh so heartily after a day's tramp that would have 'used up' most men; then sing and pray with as much earnestness as he had shot, walked and talked, could not be a common canting preacher. So we went to hear him to-day, and I am come to ask you to put our names down as regular subscribers to your church while he stands in the pulpit.'

"Now, Mr. Thorne, don't be angry with me for telling you this."

"Angry! my dear lady! There is no one else from whom I would so willingly have heard such precious words of encouragement."

"Thank you! It is good in you to say so; but I know that I shall sit in sackcloth and ashes, very low down in the Valley, until Hugh comes home, and I can ease my conscience by confession. He means to tell you himself of this conquest; but you would have from him the most guarded statement of the case that a 'cautious' man, who is modest besides, could lay before another as modest as himself. What I have said may sound fulsome, but it is the plain truth; and I have told you, partly because I couldn't keep it to myself, when I saw you, my heart was so brimming over with this news, and the thought of Gertrude's visit, and partly from a sober, honest conviction that most people are so mortally afraid of spoiling a minister, that they with-

hold the tidings of his usefulness and success, that would be a refreshment to his hungry heart. It is cheating, and the meanest kind of cheating, in my estimation."

"Your wine is of a choice vintage to-day," rejoined Thorne. "May I ask a favor, without wounding you?"

"Twenty, if you like. My skin is none of the thinnest: I have passed through such a tanning process of scoldings, convictions, and 'friendly suggestions,' that my moral cuticle is bullet-proof. Say on, and fear not."

"My petition is not even a 'friendly suggestion,'" said Thorne. "It is only a request that, for my sake, and to avoid the risk of angering the gentlemen who have honored me by their good opinion, you will say nothing of what you have told me to any one else."

Mrs. Fry promised readily, and Neale knew that she never broke her word when it was seriously pledged.

His heart was very full of gratitude and humility as he sat down at his study-desk that August morning. It was a happy reflection that his outward walk and conversation, even in scenes of pleasure, had been made the means of attracting men toward the path of right; that Christianity was, by such feeble instrumentality, demonstrated to the minds of scoffers to be a living principle, and not a dead letter of rituals and Sabbath observances. But, at the same time, he trembled under the recollection that his every step was watched, his very words weighed, when he was least conscious of such inspection, and that the result of the examination might not always be what it was in this instance. He pondered anew those strange words, "all things to all men." How was his fallible judgment to decide, in all circumstances, where the line of lawful and expedient conformity ended, and latitudinarianism commenced?

It was a difficult problem to one of his social, buoyant temperament. With his enlarged charity and scorn of ar-

bitrary conventionalisms, it was easy to throw aside prescribed rules for the government of clerical deportment; a hateful and unbecoming strait-waistcoat he vowed, in the dignity of his manhood, the self-respect of his individuality, never to assume. Yet there were sincere pietists and conceited formalists everywhere, whose exactions on this score reminded him, as he had told Miriam the night before, of the fabled edict said to have been issued by an Eastern despot, respecting the prisoners of war taken in one of his battles. Those who were the right height were enrolled in the imperial guard; those who were too short were made hewers of wood and drawers of water to the conquerors, and the few who were too tall were beheaded. But, were there not brethren among this class of dogmatists—weak, it is true—still brethren with him in the one great family, owning allegiance to its Triune Head, who might be offended by innovation upon established usages—who would confound lawful eating and drinking with sitting at meat in the idol's temple?

Perhaps no one of the peculiar embarrassments of a minister's life is less comprehended than this. Censors—and how often is it the case that the number of these is nearly co-equal with that of the entire communion!—censors, conscientious and uncandid, regretful and critical, are all apt rashly to conclude that the errors they so easily detect, could be shunned or rectified as readily. And so they might be, did all agree upon the same shortcoming; but when we consider the fact that what A. groans over as his bane, B. returns thanks for as savory meat, and the smoke in the nostrils of C. is to D. a pleasant smell, as of a field which the Lord hath blessed, the most superficial observer cannot but see the outrageous folly of any obliging endeavor on the part of one man, were he perfection embodied, to adapt himself to all tastes.

"I must hold to the straight course, with conscience for my guide," thought Thorne, in conclusion, as he had done many times before, after a like debate. "If I swerve for one, I must for another, and I was not made to walk in a zigzag line."

Monday though it was, he had a busy and a cheerful forenoon. His routine of study and visiting was now pretty well established, and he felt no disposition to shirk work, even upon the hottest days. He was surprised, on looking at his watch, to find that it was near the dinner hour. He had just time to ride home. His horse stood in a stable close by the church, and the sky being overcast with clouds, and the air cooler than in the morning, he sprang into the saddle, and set off, at a brisk canter, down the principal street of the town. This ride was no longer a dull, or lonely one. The faces of the population were becoming familiar to him, and every third person he met, whether personally acquainted with him or not, had a bow and a smile for the young and popular pastor, a sort of token of adoptive citizenship, which was very gratifying to one who had so lately come amongst them.

Just before he reached the cross street, up which he usually turned to go to Dr. Stanton's, he saw a crowd running together, a little further down the main thoroughfare, and touching the spurs to his horse, rode forward to ascertain the cause of the commotion. That rare phenomenon in Northern civilization, a street fight, between those who, in their sane moments, call themselves, and are esteemed by the community at large, as gentlemen, is, or was at the date of our story, so common in the South-west as to excite no surprise and little alarm—merely a lively interest, a temporary breeze of excitement, in the vicinity of the affray. The rapidly-increasing throng, that now blocked up the street, had, for its centre of attraction, two men engaged in a con-

test that was fiendish in its brutal ferocity. Face to face, foot to foot, hand to hand, they fought, with the notorious weapons whose invention is a lasting stigma upon the West —long, murderous-looking bowie-knives, already stained with blood. The spectators looked on in silence—motionless, in the horrible fascination that chained them to the spot. The only sounds heard were the stamping and hoarse breathing of the combatants, the sharp ring and dull slash of the infernal steel, as they hacked and hewed and thrust, with frightful celerity, at one another.

Then, cleaving the air like a peal of thunder from the cloud above, came a shout of horror and indignation—"In the name of Heaven and humanity, will none of you stop this butchery!" and, throwing the startled crowd right and left, there darted into the arena left for the battle, a figure that all there recognized.

Twenty voices cried out to him to stop. "You can't part them! you will be killed!" and a general groan burst forth as he sprang in between the flashing knives. He struck up one weapon at the same instant that he planted a blow full upon the breast of him who poised the other, a stroke so vigorous and unexpected that the man reeled several paces backward. His antagonist, with a sounding oath, made a lunge at the unarmed intruder, which he caught upon his left arm, while another blow, swift as a glance of light, paralyzed the elbow that guided the blade, and it went hurtling through the air over the heads of the bystanders.

"The game is up!" yelled an amateur prize-fighter in the ring of spectators, and there followed an instantaneous rush inward upon the three actors.

The interruption had been so sudden, and the movements of the peacemaker so quick, that the second combatant was disarmed before his opponent had recovered his balance and

senses sufficiently to renew the attack. As he steadied himself upon his feet and the mist cleared from his vision, he was confronted by a stern face, with gleaming eyes—a hand, dripping with blood, was held out to him.

"Mr. Niles—that knife if you please."

"Mr. Thorne!" ejaculated Niles. "Was it *you?*—you are hurt!"

"Not so seriously as you are, but in a better cause. Your *friend* has lost his weapon. May I have yours?"

Confounded and conscience-smitten, Niles handed it to him, and Thorne, stooping, put the point under his heel and broke it in half.

The other man proved to be the more dangerously wounded of the two. He swooned in the arms of those who withheld him from rushing, in his impotent fury, upon Thorne, and was carried into a store near by. Thither, also, Niles was led by some kind hand, and restoratives applied to both, until medical assistance could be procured. Not until he saw the ghastly, bloody face of the unconscious form, stretched upon the counter, did Neale know whom he had rescued from a violent death, or perhaps, a double murder. It was Mayor Lewis's second son—a youth of nineteen, a well-grown, athletic stripling, whose reputation about town was that of a desperate, dissipated brawler—a fit subject for his father's ethics, if not for the police-court. Three doctors were speedily on the scene of action, and went to work, with the dexterity of men used to such sanguinary operations. Neale waited to see young Lewis revive, and to send Niles's friend, Johnson, to prepare his mother for her son's coming; then, went out to mount his horse. The throng, expelled from the store by the doctors, besieged the portal to hear their report of the wounded, but they gave way respectfully, when Thorne emerged from the house. He looked pale and troubled, but he rais-

ed his hat in response to their silent greetings—even smiled, in thanking the man who held his horse, for his kind thoughtfulness in taking care of the animal.

"Look at your hands, sir!" exclaimed this person, as the minister put his foot in the stirrup. "You'd better not try to ride home. You've lost too much blood!"

The last word brought a swarm around them, in a moment.

"It is only a scratch!" answered Thorne, making an effort to disengage himself from the anxious and curious inquirers, clustering closer and closer.

"There is Dr. Stanton's carriage!" said some one. "Stop it—quick! and let them take him in!"

In vain Neale countermanded the order. Half-a-dozen boys dashed off to intercept the vehicle, which was rolling fast homeward. By dint of hurrahing and screeching, the urchins prevailed upon the driver to look around and halt, to await their approach. Miriam was the only occupant of the interior. She had been on a visit, some miles into the country, and finding that she was late for dinner, had just urged Reuben to a quicker gait. Surprised at his violation of orders, she put her head out of the window, to inquire its cause. He had no space for reply—the foremost boy running up, panting and stuttering.

"They say you must turn right around, and come straight down there, right off!"

"Who are 'they'? and what do they want?" interrogated Miriam, shortly.

"All of 'em! Down there by Dickson's store. There's been all sorts of a terrible fight."

"Is anybody hurt? What can I do?"

"Heap of people hurt—one man killed!"

"And they sent for *me!*" queried Miriam, incredulously.

"Yes!" cried they all in chorus.

"Why—who is hurt?" repeated the puzzled girl, naturally reluctant to drive into the heart of a mob, without some intelligible warrant.

"Mr. Thorne!" "The new preacher!" "The young minister!" yelled the pack, with deafening unanimity.

"Are you sure?" Miriam changed color at the astounding announcement.

"Reuben! back! directly."

"I don' b'lieve dem!" growled the negro, obeying nevertheless.

"You better b'lieve it!" retorted the chief spokesman. "He's hurt bad, too! I tell *you*, he fit awful! wust of any of 'em!"

While this colloquy was going on, Thorne had summed up all his strength in an attempt to reach the saddle, and failing, by reason of the weakness induced by loss of blood, remained standing, leaning against his horse, a sick faintness gaining upon him—strive as he might, and did, to master it. The roar of the carriage-wheels, as the horses whirled it down the street, was a welcome sound, and he tried to walk, unaided, toward it, when it drew up. Miriam unbolted the door, before the horses stopped, and held it open, while Thorne was assisted by two men, to enter.

She did not speak, except to order Reuben to drive slowly and with care, until they were in motion.

"Are you much hurt?" she asked, gently.

The bloodless lips parted in a smile. "No! yet I must have lost a good deal of blood."

He lifted his left arm, and a purple stream trickled from his fingers. Miriam quitted her place on the front seat, and knelt beside him, without a word; parted the sleeve cut by the bowie-knife, and exposed a long wound on the inside of the arm, where Lewis's blade had entered.

"No! no! it is not fit work for you!" remonstrated

Neale, drawing his hand from hers, as he saw her shudder.

"Be quiet!"

She bound her handkerchief tightly about the cut, replaced the sleeve, and passed to the examination of his hands. They were badly gashed, so fast and furious had been the rain of blows, at the moment of his interference.

"Where is your handkerchief?"

He made a movement toward the breast pocket of his coat, which she intercepted herself, taking out the article desired. Tearing the cambric into strips, she wrapped up the wounded members with skill and dispatch, never hesitating, although her fingers were stained by the warm blood.

Thorne attempted to dissuade her.

"Wait until we get home!" he murmured, distressed at seeing her perform such offices.

"I do not pretend to dress these places—only to exclude the air. Grandpapa will tell you that they should not be exposed to it for an instant longer than is necessary. He will attend to them properly when we reach home."

Her next act was to remove the cover from a bottle of cologne—one of her purchases in the town that morning, and bathe his face—for a bluish pallor was creeping over it, and there were dark shades about the eyes and mouth, that would have terrified a timorous or nervous woman.

"You are *so* good!"

In pain and deathly weakness, he could still smile gratefully, then closed his eyes once more.

Miriam was mute and watchful, until they reached home, and even her grandfather, who knew her better than did any one else, marvelled at the presence of mind she manifested in the transfer of her charge to the house and his care. The household had been alarmed by the volunteer rider of Thorne's steed, who had spurred onward in advance

of Reuben, and conveyed an exaggerated account of the casualty. "Mr. Thorne had tried to part two fellows who were fighting, and been almost killed between them," was the abstract of his wordy communication. The family, white and black, were gathered upon the piazza and in the front yard, to witness and assist in the removal of the wounded man from the carriage.

Miriam descended first. "It is nothing very serious, I trust, Grandpapa. Do not be frightened, Mamma, dear! Uncle Parker! Edwin! help Mr. Thorne into the study!"

She preceded them to adjust the pillows; ordered water, sponge and towels; herself brought a fan and vinaigrette, and withdrew, leaving Thorne in the hands of Dr. Stanton, and the sympathizing Parker.

Before the Doctor had finished examining and dressing the wounds, there arrived sundry messengers from the town, solicitous to learn the extent of Mr. Thorne's injuries, and eager with offers of assistance. Mrs. Hartley received those who came earliest. She had sent her daughter to lie down, and, with commingled housewifely and maternal solicitude, caused a waiter of refreshments, including her panacea for "nervousness," whether of body or mind—a cup of tea, to follow her to her chamber. "The dear child's nerves needed steadying."

The effect of the beverage must have been speedy, for half an hour had not elapsed from the time of her leaving her mother, when Miriam walked into the parlor, graceful and self-possessed, to aid in entertaining the visitors. Up to this moment, she had heard no account of the affray, except the garbled statement of the boys sent in pursuit of her. Mrs. Hartley had learned more of the truth from the officious messenger who brought her the tidings, and supposed that Miriam was, of course, in possession of the facts of the case. Without believing, for a second, that Mr.

Thorne had been an active participant in a street fight, Miriam was yet perplexed by the testimony of the juvenile spectators, and Neale's condition. Too proud, or too prudent to ask questions about that which she saw she was expected to understand, she was inexpressibly tantalized by the allusions dropped from one and another of those who were constantly coming and going all the afternoon. She had gleaned but three additional items of information with regard to the event, viz.: that Robert Niles and David Lewis were the primal antagonists; that both were severely wounded; and that, by some unexplained mischance, Mr. Thorne had received his hurts from one or both of them—when Mrs. Fry made her appearance. Fortunately, Mrs. Hartley and her daughter were alone, having just bidden adieu to what Mrs. Fry called "a raft of company." Some minutes later, Dr. Stanton descended from Thorne's chamber, and reported him comfortable, and likely to do well.

"Now, Mrs. Fry!" he said, wheeling his arm-chair in front of her, "be so kind as to begin at the beginning, take your own time, and tell me in your own way, all that you know of this unhappy affair. I have not been so excited and grieved in years, as I am by the little I have gathered. Mr. Thorne is reserved on the subject—indeed, I have forbidden him to enter upon any explanations. He only said, when I looked grave at sight of his arm (the knife went uncomfortably near an artery!)—'I am sorry, sir, but I got that in no unrighteous work!'"

"Isn't that exactly like him!" exclaimed Mrs. Fry. "Any other man would have been eager to justify himself. You know, I suppose, that that forward goose, Letty Lewis, who has been perishing for the want of a whipping ever since I knew her, was at the bottom of the trouble. I hope she will rest satisfied with this lesson."

"We have heard nothing. What had she to do with it?"

"Why, it seems that she has tossed her empty little head higher than usual lately, because, forsooth, the son of a boatman has wedded the daughter of a whilom hog-driver—now a Congressman—though, if half the stories they tell of the House of Representatives be true, he hasn't arisen many degrees by changing his profession. But Miss Letitia's brain is topsy-turvy, and she has proved her accession of refinement and aristocracy, by turning up her nose more than nature intended it to curl—and that is saying a good deal—at such unfortunates among her acquaintances as never had a drunken grandfather in the Legislature, who died of delirium-tremens, because he couldn't go to Congress. You know she has always taken it in high dudgeon that Robert Niles is noticed with favor by some of the best people here. Happening to hear that this would be his birthday, she and her hopeful brother bought, on Saturday, a miniature tub and wash-board, and packed them up, together with a square of yellow soap, in a small box, writing on the inside of the lid: 'Remember the pit whence thou wert digged!' This was enclosed in silver paper, and over this were two or three other wrappers, perfumed and tied with white ribbon. The whole was sent this morning to Mr. Niles' store. It so chanced that there were several young men there at the time, who had dropped in to wish him many happy returns of the anniversary—for he is a general favorite. He had an intimation yesterday, that his Bible-class meant to present him with some token of their regard. They say he is an excellent and faithful teacher. Supposing that this was the expected package, he invited his friends to stay and see it. Paper after paper was untied, and, just as their curiosity was on tiptoe, out came the contents of the box!"

"Abominable!" said Miriam, warmly.

"Wasn't it? Robert has always displayed sterling sense and feeling with respect to his mother, who, by the way, is

descended of a much better stock than are the Lewises. But this was a terrible stab, and what made it worse was, that the bystanders, taken aback by the unlooked-for revelation, laughed thoughtlessly, but not unkindly. Poor Robert stood for an instant transfixed with disappointment and mortification. Then he became furiously angry, and vowed vengeance against the perpetrator of this piece of cruel impertinence. It was easy to trace her, for Letitia's handwriting is as familiar to the young men hereabouts, as her saucy face, and Niles hunted up the negro boy who brought the package, and made him confess that David Lewis had paid him a quarter of a dollar to be the bearer. These discoveries added fuel to the flame, for Niles dislikes the brother and sister as heartily as they despise him, and with more reason. Nothing would pacify him. He had never carried any weapon before, but he now bought a bowie-knife, which he buttoned inside of his coat; and, taking a cane in his hand, walked up and down the street until he met young Lewis. Robert stopped him, and inquired whether he or his sister were the author of the practical joke played upon him that day. David assumed the credit of the deed on the spot, and seemed very proud of the idea. Robert demanded an apology, and receiving, instead, an insolent refusal, struck him with the cane. David always goes armed, as Niles knew when he provided himself with the knife, and they drew at the same moment. Lewis was not quite sober, it was said, and so slashed sometimes at random. At any rate, it is likely that he would have been killed but for Mr. Thorne's interference."

"How did he interfere?" asked the Doctor. "He surely was not so reckless as to try, single-handed, to separate two armed men in the heat of battle?"

"But he did just that thing! They say he shouted, like a war-trumpet, for some one to part them—but did you

ever see a man, born and bred in Kentucky, who would spoil a fight? And, without waiting for help, he dashed through the crowd with the boldness of a lion, and contrived, by knocking Niles over and striking Lewis' knife out of his hand, to stop the bloody proceedings. Those who were lookers-on—more shame to them that they *did* stand by and do nothing!—report that our hero hit as hard and square as a trained pugilist; an uncommon accomplishment for a clergyman, it appears to me. Of course it was very wicked and unfeeling, but the story goes that wagers were laid in the crowd, that he would whip them both, with no weapon but his fists."

"He has great muscular power," remarked Dr. Stanton, with a touch of pride. "His arms are slender, but are strung with sinews as firm and tough as whipcord. Foolish boy! What possessed him to get into such a scrape? One ounce of his blood is worth all that David Lewis has in his body. I am sorry for Robert Niles, however. He had great provocation; still, I had hoped for different things from one who professes to be actuated by Christian principles."

Miriam stole quietly from the room;—so quietly, that she was not missed for a while, and sought her chamber. There she sank upon the bed, and gave herself up to the contending emotions she had kept down, for the last few hours. Her nerves had been overtasked; her feelings wrought up to the highest pitch of excitability, yet her iron will had restrained the exhibition of this, while the season of action lasted. She knew all now: there was nothing more to hear, or to do, and her strength failed. For these reasons, and these only, the hysterical tears overleaped the floodgates, and had their way, until she sobbed herself into quietude. These paroxysmal bursts were one of the laws of her nature. Sound sense and obstinate resolve might chain the wild,

impulsive spirit, for a time; but in the end, it snapped its bonds, and revelled, or raged, as joy or passion animated it.

Meantime, Neale Thorne lay on his bed, reviewing in his wearied brain the events of the day that had commenced so brightly, and closed so darkly—haunted, principally, by the phantasm of the marble face and busy, apt fingers, streaked redly with his blood—of the "strange girl," who had played doctress to him, in that slow, painful ride. Finally, as the dulness of the weary frame infected the mind, he, with the last energy of waking nature, made an end of the controversy.

"She is kind, prompt, skilful, and courageous—but for me—for mankind in general, she has no more feeling than a stone!"

And fell asleep upon his verdict.

CHAPTER VIII.

AURORA LEIGH.

TUESDAY, Thorne obeyed instructions, and kept his room. Wednesday was the first of three days of cloud and tempest—a wild, sweeping August storm, that brought with it the bleak discomfort of November. The house was very still, that afternoon. Dr. Stanton had gone, in his close carriage, to visit a very sick patient, some miles away. Mrs. Hartley had taken Willie with her, up-stairs, to explore the recesses of certain closets, whose treasures were, to him, the solace of many wet days. Miriam sat alone by the study-fire, for this was not a latitude where housewives waited, whatever might be the thermometer's story, until the calendar declared the warm weather over and gone, before they allowed the hearthstone to be warmed. A merry blaze twisted and curled around the dry sticks, laid upon the tall old andirons, and sang blithely of home-comfort and fire-side joys. Miriam was reading in her grandfather's great chair, one hand supporting her cheek and partially buried in her hair; the other held her book. She read fitfully—now, rapidly, her eyes devouring page after page—as it were, in ravenous haste—then, she would dwell for whole minutes upon a single paragraph; the dark orbs assume a liquid softness; perhaps, the hand, grasping the volume, sink to her knee, and a season of reverie and fire-gazing ensue.

It was one of these dreams which was disturbed by a slight noise, and looking up, she saw Mr. Thorne in the

door-way. She could not repress a start at his unexpected appearance and the alteration effected by two days of suffering.

"Mr. Thorne! are you really well enough to leave your room?"

"Oh, yes! at least, I am tired of staying in it. I am an eminently social animal when I am sick, and the loneliness of this dreary day was insupportable in the upper regions of the house. Do not trouble yourself—I beg!"

She was arranging a tempting pile of pillows at one end of the lounge.

"It is a pleasure—not a trouble," returned she, sincerely. "Since you have broken one set of orders, there is the more reason why you should obey another. In Grandpapa's absence, I must make your imprisonment as tolerable as I can."

Thorne thanked her and sank back upon the cushions—while with the sedate air of matronly carefulness, that always amused him, she covered him with a shawl, kept there for such purposes.

"There! are you comfortable?" she asked, crossing her hands, and inclining her head slightly to one side—regardful and complacent.

"Entirely! I thank you!"

"How are your wounds?"

"Less painful than they were yesterday and last night. They are sore and stiff, but feel no longer as though red-hot talons were tearing them wider. I cannot better image the heat and throbbing and shooting pains I endured for twenty-four hours."

"I am glad you are better. We will nurse you into thorough convalescence shortly. You are tired of solitary state, you say. What can I do to amuse you? Will you have music?"

"Yes—but of conversation, if you please."

"I cannot object, if you desire it. What shall be the theme of our discourse? to borrow a professional phrase."

"Whatever you like. Parker is a highly estimable personage, in his way, but it is a delightful change to hear some other voice than his. I shall be content if you talk of nothing more interesting than the weather."

"And do you join in the popular ridicule of this important topic? I thought Nature had been more kind to you; had admitted you to the arcana, unexplored and unknown to the vulgar. There are certain of the more palpable varieties of her face and moods, which the uninitiated are permitted to perceive and enjoy. The veriest dunce in her school can tell you that the sun shines; from what quarter the wind blows; that it is a fine night, a 'pretty' day, or a rainy season—but to the true lover-student, she imparts richer, more extensive lore. Sunbeams, flowers, stars, clouds, and tempests are, to him, exhaustless teachers, welcome companions. Knowest thou these things?"

She said this in a playfully hortatory strain, sitting opposite to him in the great chair, her lively tones falling refreshingly upon the invalid's ear.

"Somewhat I have heard of such mysteries, fair priestess, and would fain learn more. So dull is mine ear, in its ignorance, that it discerneth naught in the continual plashing of water against yon casement, except the monotonous discord of a summer storm, that chilleth my corporeal substance and weigheth down my spirit."

"A summer storm!" repeated Miriam, in scorn. "The ear is dull, indeed, that cannot detect the difference between summer and autumn rain. This is no more a summer storm, than the bleating of a lamb is the growl of a lion, turning in his lair. Listen!"

The wind bent and swayed the heavily-foliaged boughs,

and mingled their rent leaves with the drifts of rain, that broke against the window. Thorne pretended to shiver.

"I own the justice of your simile. But what—allow me to inquire—have lion-tempests to do abroad in August?"

"They have, it may be, the same mission that forebodings of evil have to us in our prosperity—to warn us that the dark days are at hand, for which it behooves us to make preparation. Nature is no prodigal, or aimless instructress."

"Autumn then brings to you, as she did to Bryant, 'the melancholy days, the saddest of the year?'"

"Yes—but, thanks to the gentle mother, it is a pleasing sadness. I love all seasons—I love this world—I love life! I cannot help it. Is it wrong?"

"It would be wrong and unnatural if you did not. There is a deal of nonsensical cant talked about this 'wretched existence;' this 'vale of tears;' and a yearning to leave these hateful shades, for which I find no warrant in reason or religion. If a parent appoints, as his son's habitation, a temporary abode, to be exchanged, at the giver's pleasure, for an enduring inheritance, filial love and respect instruct that child to appreciate the beauties, which, by his father's command, adorn his transient home. He is willing to await the promised summons, and while he waits he endeavors to be contented—happy—grateful—as beseems the recipient of so many good and gracious gifts. So, Life has its trials, and the paths of thousands of GOD'S children have been thickly beset with them, since the man after His own heart cried out: 'Oh! that I had wings like a dove! then I would fly away and be at rest!' But this man was not usually impatient to die. Hear him pray, upon the bed of languishing, 'Spare me, that I may recover strength, ere I go hence and be no more!' And, again: 'I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up; *while I suffer Thy*

terrors I am distracted! My soul is full of troubles; my life draweth nigh unto the grave!'"

"I believe you are right!" said Miriam, thoughtfully. "I read once an old allegory, in which a Mr. Weary-of-the-world figured largely, as a mistaken saint, who believed himself ripe for Heaven, when he was only out of patience with the work and crosses of his lot in life. I think there are many of his descendants alive upon the earth, at the present day."

"It is sad to reflect that this is so," replied Thorne. "This one truth I hold as firmly as any other tenet of our faith; our Father never meant that we should weary of the life He has given, until He is ready to recall it. He designs that we shall be as happy here as is consistent with His plans for our final welfare, and we seek to frustrate His purposes when we neglect to employ the lawful means of attaining this end. Who, in a kingdom should be happy, if not the children of its Ruler? Even His clouds have their silver lining; the Valley of Baca, its wells; to the night of weeping is promised a morning of joy."

He spoke fervently—but Miriam noticed that he breathed quickly and irregularly—the more so, as the conversation progressed, and there was a hectic spot on either cheek. She opened her book.

"Here is a passage I was reading at your entrance. It chimes in well with what you have been saying:

> 'Yet be taught;
> He's better to us than many mothers are,
> And children cannot wander beyond reach
> Of the sweep of His white raiment. Touch-and hold!
> And if you weep still, weep where John was laid,
> While Jesus loved him.'

"Have you-read 'Aurora Leigh?'"

"I have not. I know little of Mrs. Browning."

"Yet you love poetry!"

"Yes—but I have been led, by the representations of others, to doubt whether I should admire her mysticisms."

"And so judge her unheard? That is unfair. But it is a common prejudice among those who have gained their ideas of her second-hand, from the adherents of the Wordsworthian school. It is easy to forgive an occasional lapse into mysticism, and, *par necessité*, into obscurity, in one whose pages are strewn with such pearls as the extract I have just read, and this, which I find, in turning the leaf:

> 'So Marian sat by Lucy's bed, content
> With duty, and was strong, for recompense,
> To hold the lamp of human love, arm-high,
> To catch the death-strained eyes, and comfort them,
> Until the angels, on the luminous side
> Of Death, had got theirs ready.'

"Cannot you see the picture?"

"I do! Read on!"

She obeyed, and very soon, she read to him, as she had done to herself—earnestly, eloquently, in forgetfulness of self and possible criticism—for pages together; then, checked by his questionings concerning the *dramatis personæ* or the plot of the narrative, she paused to explain; or, arrested by the exceeding force and beauty of the lines she had just been over, she lowered the book and repeated them slowly, half to herself—half to him, and there would be an interval of conversation. Meantime, the rain streamed without, and the wind moaned unheard. Miriam was intent upon her author, and Thorne was not more absorbed in the book, than in watching her. Her whole aspect underwent a wondrous transformation. Vivified and etherealized by spirit-fire, her features were instinct with beauty, and beauty of a rare order. Her voice was the obedient instrument of will and feeling—tender, gay, deeply-strong, by turns.

Thus through the church-scene, where Romney waited for his lowly bride; the light badinage of the patricians in the heterogeneous throng; that broken stream of sarcastic comment, sneer and scanty praise, that fell meaningless, uncared-for, upon Aurora's ear—her sad soul counting the seconds of suspense by pained heart-throbs; the announcement of Marian's disappearance, and the tumult that followed; the search—and the interview of the cousins, in which Romney declared the quest ended, and Aurora essayed to comfort him; their parting, and the return of each to work; her lonely labor and restless aspirations; the stern ambition, and blind as stern, that answered the defrauded woman-nature, pining for companionship—for sympathy, for LOVE! breaking forth, in the flush of triumph—of success achieved—of fame won—in that impassioned, immortal apostrophe:

"My Father! Thou hast knowledge—only Thou—
How dreary 'tis for women to sit still,
On winter nights, by solitary fires,
And hear the nations praising them far off!
Too far! aye, praising our quick sense of love,
Our very heart of passionate womanhood,
Which could not beat so in the verse, without
Being present also in the unkissed lips,
And eyes undried, because there's none to ask
The reason they grew moist!"

With this, the full tones trembled, and Miriam closed the book.

"It is the old—forever the sad story of woman's efforts to achieve great works and splendid renown. The first eager clutch at the fruit crushes the painted shell, and leaves nothing for the palate but bitter dust. I can read no more! My throat aches!"

She put up her hand to still the hysterical pulsations, that were not caused by weariness.

"And do not men pluck Sodom apples, also, in loveless Fame?" asked Neale.

"Once or twice in a lifetime, perhaps," she answered, quickly. "While Life is new and your hearts are soft. I suppose the infant palm needs support; that it grows faster and straighter for being lashed to an upright stick, until the wood forms and the bark hardens. Then, hey for the clouds! no more leaning—no useless branches that might seem to invite the touch of clasping tendrils, while they drew the strength from the trunk!—only the upright column; and, when its height is accomplished, a leafy crown for the capital of the shaft."

"You are severe—and, I think, unjust. The intellectual and moral giants of earth seek partners—surround themselves with home-loves, and appear to enjoy them as do other men."

"I do not deny it. It must seem a pretty and graceful thing to the palm, to see the creeper twining about its sturdy sides. It may like to have this humble companion, but it does not *need* it. The simile is trite, and, like most other trite things, true."

She studied the fire awhile.

"I do not complain of woman's dependence and man's sovereignty, Mr. Thorne," she resumed, with a slight and very musical laugh. "The law bears date of the Creation, and Aurora has added but one to the thousands who have striven, in wilful, obstinate rebellion, to work out a different result to a problem bearing hardly upon solitary womanhood. Those of us who are set in families, must acknowledge the beneficence of the ordinance, while we pity the suffering few who refuse to learn it except through heart-breaking disappointment. That poverty is wretchedness, indeed, which consists in a dearth of loving companionship."

"My mother used to say it was the only penury that

ought to reach the heart," replied Thorne. "And she undoubtedly believed what she asserted. Affection was her native air, without which she would have pined and died. Did I ever tell you how often your mother reminds me of her?"

"Never! Does she? I am very glad," said Miriam, interested. "Are they alike in appearance?"

"Far more in manner. Mrs. Hartley has the gentle grace of action and winning speech, that attracted even strangers to my mother; the unfailing care for others' happiness, which made life a waste and pleasure a mockery, to the objects of her most tender solicitude, when she was taken from them."

The twilight was gathering in the corners of the room, and they saw one another's faces most plainly by the confidential fire-flashes. Miriam questioned, and Neale replied —presently at such length, that his answers grew into a narrative; a short history of his mother's life and character, particularly that part of her existence which he remembered best—her love and goodness to himself. Miriam listened with encouraging attention, the more flattering because of its sincerity. Thorne had never had a genuine home-talk with her before, very seldom a *tête-à-tête* of five minutes' duration; and neither had guessed, until now, how much of congeniality existed between their minds, tastes, and hearts.

"How I wish I had known her!" was Miriam's exclamation, as Neale paused, after an allusion to his latest parting from this fond parent, at the beginning of his second and last year in the seminary. Her death was sudden, and there was no time to summon him before all was over. "How I wish I had known her! Which of your sisters is most like her?"

"Caroline, the second daughter. She has dark hair and eyes. The other two are blondes."

"Does either of them resemble you?"

"Gertrude is said to bear a flattered likeness to me," rejoined Thorne, smiling.

Miriam did not notice or return the smile. She was thoroughly engrossed in the examination of family portraits.

"Have you a favorite among them?"

"I suppose that I have. They accuse me of partiality for Gertrude. She is nearest my age, and, for three years before my mother's death, was the only one at home. It was inevitable that I should be more intimate with her than with the married sisters."

"Describe her to me. She is handsome, you say?"

"*Did* I say so?"

"You implied it. You said that she was better looking than yourself," responded Miriam, naïvely.

Thorne laughed outright. "At the risk of being charged with affected humility, let me remind you that there are many gradations between even a moderate share of homeliness and positive beauty. Yet you are right. Gertrude is much better looking than myself, and she is considered handsome. She is about your height, perhaps half an inch taller; has blue eyes; hair of the same color as mine; and a fair, fresh complexion. Her conversational talents are more than respectable; in manner she is easy, yet dignified; and she has a warm, kind heart. Have you caught the likeness, do you think?"

"Yes—," replied she, slowly. "Only, what do you mean by 'dignified'? Reserved—distant to strangers—repellant?"

"By no means repellant; nor would you call her reserved. I have not the word at my command with which to express the precise shade of dignity one observes in her. When you see her you will understand what I cannot explain."

Miriam did not look easy or satisfied.

"Will she awe me?"

The question, put with her usual directness, took Neale by surprise.

"How ridiculous!" he said, much amused. "Why should she? You are her equal in education—more than her equal in intellect and accomplishments. I am in earnest! I should not dare to pay you an idle, senseless compliment. And, if you will suffer me to speak still more plainly—there is more danger of Gertrude's being 'awed' by you, than of her overwhelming you by a sense of her superiority."

"By me! There you are mistaken. I never had any dignity," said Miriam, honestly and positively.

"I never saw a woman who had more, when she chose to cloak herself in that garb," returned Thorne, pleasantly, but as positively.

"Mr. Thorne!"

"Miss Hartley!"

"You know that dignified, decorous young ladies do not behave as I do."

"You assuredly comport yourself like a dignified, decorous young lady, at all events."

"You are laughing at me!" Her cheek glowed suddenly.

"Indeed, I should not presume to do so, were I not withheld by the respect due from a gentleman to a lady."

Miriam looked down for some moments.

"I wish *I* dared say to you what is in my thoughts!" she resumed, hesitatingly.

"Consider yourself, for the nonce, Gertrude Thorne, and let me be your brother," answered Neale, kindly. "Would you doubt, then, whether it were best for you to speak?"

"I would not. I have no brother, and thereupon rests what I wished to say. My training has been a singular

mixture of a girl's and boy's education. My brother Henry died when I was about sixteen. I have spent but two years of my life away from this house, and those were at school. I mingled little with other girls there. I longed for my family and the country, and my object in going to this establishment being to perfect myself in music and French, I applied myself to these indefatigably, that I might sooner be ready to come back to my home. You see what my daily life is, and that I have no intimate associates among the young ladies of Limestone—and thus it has always been. Grandpapa educated me almost entirely. From infancy I have been his pet and companion. During the twelvemonth that elapsed between poor Harry's return from college and his marriage, which took place when I was in my fifteenth year, the house was the resort of his friends, and, for one or two of these I formed a sisterly attachment that has never changed. Then Harry's sad death was followed by that of his wife. These events separated us—Grandpapa, Mamma, and myself—yet more from our well-meaning, but not too considerate neighbors, and Willie required much of my time and thoughts. For nearly two years I visited nowhere except at Mr. Fry's. I learned to rely upon my books for society; upon the inmates of my own home for love and sympathy, while the rides and walks, insisted upon by Grandpapa, as a daily regimen, were long and erratic, and when he could not accompany me, I usually went alone, or attended only by Parker. To these peculiarities in my mode of life, is, I suppose, to be attributed the fact that people sometimes call me 'odd.' I do not covet the reputation of singularity. I hate to be styled eccentric. So far from regarding eccentricity as an evidence of genius or sense, I consider it a weakness—a proof that judgment or taste is warped from the just standard."

"We agree there! No man has a right to differ so widely from the generality of his kind, in outward behavior, as to excite their wonderment or ridicule. Common sense teaches that it is safest and wisest to be, in most respects, as commonplace as is consistent with the exercise of free-will and the development of individuality. How does your oddity 'crop out'—as they say of coal veins? You dress, look and talk, like a sensible, well-behaved member of civilized society. You carry no significant ink-spot upon your thumb, as did the literary lady of the ballad, or splotches upon your face, like poor Caddy Jellyby. There is no smell of chemicals, or paints, or varnishes, about the house; Willie's attire is neat and tasteful, and his behavior irreproachable; I think I heard your grandfather praise a pudding of your making, the other day, and your mother agreed with him that you would soon prove yourself to be a pattern housekeeper. In what respect, do they say, that you fail in being a model daughter and citizeness?"

This was not altogether candid in Mr. Thorne. He had told nothing but the truth, yet it was not the whole truth. He began to feel that, by the help of this afternoon's conversation, he might come to an understanding of Miriam Hartley's character. He felt, also, that when he did master it, it would be a new "specimen" in his study of womankind—a union of masculine energy and intellectual power with feminine sensibility and fancy; the unaffected candor and freedom from vanity, that one sometimes sees in an unspoiled child, and the penetration, the ready tact, the self-possession, belonging to matronhood. Her relation of the influences that had biassed, if not moulded, her disposition and habits, cleared up much that he had not comprehended previously, and he purposely framed his inquiry so as to lead her on to yet franker speech;—conscious, as he was, all the time, that an account of his own varying and contradictory

impressions of her, during their acquaintanceship, would be a better answer than any she could give.

"I cannot tell exactly—only, that I am unlike most girls who have sisters and brothers, and who mix constantly in gay society. I do not like parties, although I usually go, when I am invited to them, for fear of giving offence. I had rather sit in a corner of a crowded assembly-room and talk with an elderly gentleman or lady—provided he or she converse upon such topics as interest me—for an entire evening, than to be introduced to a dozen rattlepate beaux;—a defect in taste, that shows me to be destitute of the ambition for bellehood, indigenous to the feminine character. I get wofully tired of discussing bonnets, dresses, and my neighbors' affairs;—so, I am devoid alike of love for the beautiful and philanthropy. I have always preferred dogs to dolls; horses to stupid men; and books to gossip;—so, I am 'strong minded.' Do not think me satirical or ill-natured in saying these things! I can recapitulate them calmly—jocularly, this evening, but there have been times when a jest or a taunt upon my peculiarities has cost me a sleepless —I am ashamed to own it—a tearful night. It is a very sore subject with me."

"Your experience, while it is not a common one, is yet not so novel as you may suppose. Among the petty tyrannies of social life, there is none more rigorous or irrational than the power vested in dullards and fools, to put a ban upon whatever is beyond their comprehension, and the acquiescence of the man of education and appreciation in their preposterous edicts. In subscribing to their levelling system, beyond the external observances we alluded to, a while ago, we do injustice to ourselves and to those whom we might elevate. I have known persons who carried the doctrine of conformity so far, and courted popularity so shamelessly, as to speak incorrectly, while in the presence of those

whose grammatical defects were chronic, while their adoption and lavish use of provincialisms diverted the natives of the district, they thus sought to compliment, as much as it did the lookers-on. There is a medium between offensive singularity and more offensive sycophancy—"

The lock of the door leading into the hall was turned, after one or two ineffectual attempts, as if the two tiny hands grasping the polished knob had slipped ere the bolt yielded, and a small figure stole into the *chiaro obscuro*—the dusky red of the blended twilight and fire-gleams.

"Milly! are you in here?"

"Yes, dear. This way!"

Willie clambered to his perch upon her knee, and opened his eyes to their utmost size, to make out the distinguishing outlines of the dark form extended upon the sofa.

"Don't you know me, Willie?" asked Neale.

"Yes, sir—I do now! How do you do, sir?" inquired the miniature gentleman, with formal politeness.

"I am better—thank you."

"You were hurt very much—weren't you, sir?"

"Pretty badly—but I shall soon be well now, I hope."

"You were like the peacemakers our Saviour blessed," continued the child, who had caught his aunt's habit of straightforward speech. "Milly read to me what He said about them, the night after you were hurt. I thought you would be well soon, for I ask our Father in Heaven, every day, to cure your hands."

"You are very kind to remember me. I am glad to know that you pray for me, my dear boy."

"But," interrupted Willie, eagerly, "If I were you, I wouldn't get well *too* fast. I like to be just sick enough to have Milly hold my head, and talk and sing to me. It is very nice!"

The artless eulogy was smothered by the pressure of a

hand upon his lips, and Miriam asked some question that diverted his thoughts. To prevent embarrassment, Thorne reverted to their late conversation.

"It was well that I was interrupted in my harangue. I was becoming didactic and prosy. I thank you for whiling away the otherwise tedious afternoon for me; but I am more grateful that you have listened so patiently to my egotistical reminiscences, and talked with me, as friend to friend. I hope and believe that we understand one another too well now, ever to retrograde into ceremonious, superficial intercourse."

He was weary, but happier, with a sort of serene homelike content, than he had been before during his residence in his new abode. Lying among the pillows, he listened to Miriam's pleasant undertone of chat with Willie, and the sobbing of the blast against the drenched panes—wakeful, yet dreamy;—a sweet, formless vision, he did not seek to analyze. Dr. Stanton's entrance put an end to dreams and twilight—and Thorne's most distinct recollection of his reverie was its starting-point—Willie's innocent observation:

"I like to be just sick enough to have Milly hold my head, and talk and sing to me. It is very nice!"

CHAPTER IX.

CONVALESCENCE.

"Come and look at the glorious sunset!" said Miriam, throwing up the study-window, on Friday afternoon.

She had just finished writing a letter from Thorne's dictation, to his sister Gertrude, and as she raised her head from the desk, the sun burst through the clouds, changing the gray, watery masses into a gorgeous canopy for his regal couch. Every wet leaf was washed with molten gold, and tipped with its diamond. The East caught the crimson glow from the West, and their burning blushes met and flowed into one, at the zenith. What was before clinging, oppressive humidity in the air was purified into delicious freshness, and from bower and grove resounded the vespers of rejoicing songsters. Miriam leaned against the window-frame, and inhaled long, deep draughts of the evening breeze, and, she fancied, of sunshine with it, so impregnated was the atmosphere with the mellow lustre.

"It is the elixir of life!" she said to her companion. "Drink and live."

"I do not believe that I was ever less glad to see the sun," rejoined Neale soberly. "It is selfish in me to feel and to say it, but I have enjoyed these three rainy days with such zest, that I am sorry to bid farewell to the storm. Are there voices of the sunlight, as of the rain?"

"Certainly—but a more finely-cultivated ear is required to perceive them," returned Miriam gayly. "I doubt not that you will learn their utterances too, in time."

"The graver actualities of existence close in upon me, with return of strength and fair weather. I dread to perform—yet cannot, ought not to delay the business of to-morrow. I must ride down into the town and see Robert Niles—also, call upon Mrs. Lewis. This affair is a heavy sorrow to her."

"Are you strong enough? Had you not better wait until Monday? Both the young men are doing well. Grandpapa thinks that Mr. Niles will be about in a week."

"I had rather see him as he is—in feebleness and suffering, for he needs me more. He is paying very dearly for an hour of unholy revenge."

"Will the church deal hardly with him, do you suppose?"

"Not *hardly*—if there is in it the spirit of its Founder; but I imagine there will be an investigation of the matter. The thought sickens me. I have no vocation for the inquisitorial office. This is another reason why I want to see Niles before he falls into rougher hands. I would judge for myself of the state of his mind."

"Grandpapa says that he appears very penitent, and regrets that David is more severely wounded than himself, since he made the attack. But a greater grief to him is that you were injured in attempting to save him."

"My motive was not personal regard for him or his opponent, for I did not recognize either until they were parted. I sought to spare the effusion of human blood, an impulse of common humanity, which, in this region, may be confounded with morbid sentimentality. I am sorry to admit the conviction, but, judging from the tone of popular feeling which I observed that day, and sundry remarks, to which I have since listened, I must believe that the sentiment of the Kentucky public does not vary very materially from the sneering inquiry of the French infidel—'What signifies the turning of a few ounces of red liquid from its natural chan-

nel?' In a civilized—in what is nominally a God-fearing community, one would imagine that the thought of the imperishable soul gliding into eternity, with the ebb of that current, would act as a salutary restraint upon this taste for sanguinary scenes."

"Would you be a non-combatant in all circumstances?" asked Miriam, averting her eyes.

"I cannot say what sin I might commit at the sudden attack of a great temptation. My blood is no sluggish, icy stream, and, overheated, might urge me to deeds that would blacken my Christian name. I hope no man will ever assault me, and, if he should, that grace will be given me to act upon the defensive alone. Unfortunately for the consistency of principles, it is easier to discuss points of morality and expediency, in the peaceful retirement of one's own home, than to exemplify their lessons, when anger is raised to fever-heat, and all the sleeping demons are aroused from their lurking-places in the human heart."

"You would do battle for your own life. What if the hand of the murderer were raised against one whom you loved better than life itself?"

"His blood should rest upon his own head, or I would fall in the defence of that dear one," said Neale, emphatically.

"Thank you!"

"Why should you thank me? Because I have informed you that theologues have living blood in their hearts and veins, and not milk-and-water?" inquired Thorne, somewhat nettled, and more wounded than the occasion required.

Why did she thank him, unless for the assurance that he was no lily-livered craven, who would shrink behind a "flag of truce," for protection, while all that other men held themselves bound, in sacred honor, to defend, was torn from him? Was it possible that she could so unworthily misconstrue his vindication of the laws, laid down for

His followers, by Him, whom she professed, like himself, to serve?

Miriam gazed at him in sorrowful amaze. "My gratitude had no such origin. Some day I will tell you why I spoke as I did. It would be unkind and absurd in me—in any one, to doubt your manliness and courage, after the scene of last Monday. If we are to be friends, you must not suspect me of inuendoes or covert intimations. I am overblunt, at times. I never insinuate. It is despicable and cowardly. A sentiment which needs to be conveyed through the medium of a hint, had better remain unexpressed, until the convenient season for plain-speaking arrives."

"Forgive me! I was rude and unjust. I ought to have known you better!"

He ought—for simple acquaintanceship had ripened into intimate knowledge of each other's dispositions, views, and tastes, within three days. Had they met twenty years later, their conversation, through the long, rainy afternoons, would probably have been restricted to the great world of fact, and if it touched upon the subjective, metaphysical generalities would have been the order of the day. Their ages being respectively twenty, and twenty-five, and each being experimentally unaware of the danger of examining edge-tools too narrowly, they had, unconsciously, tempted one another to unreserved expression of feeling, along with thought; while, after the imperfect synopsis of their personal histories, exchanged on the first evening of Neale's leaving his room, very few of the outward circumstances of their lives were related. Both were happier for the formation of this new bond; both foresaw in their friendship, comfort, enjoyment, benefit—and each believed that his or hers was the larger share of profit to be derived from the intercourse.

Thorne was correct in his prognostications that, with the

passing of the storm, would recommence a round of interruptions from abroad. That evening, the parlor was nearly filled with company, and the pastor, having indiscreetly allowed the foremost to catch him below stairs, found, afterward, no space for retreat, until Dr. Stanton authoritatively ordered him to retire. He slept feverishly, and awoke languid and depressed. The Doctor was displeased and annoyed, and after venting his chagrin upon the unsuspecting absentees, whose intended kindness had undone so much of his week's work, condemned the patient to pass the morning in his chamber. Neale had a will of his own, that vied in stoutness with his host's, and he proved it by paying his projected visits in Limestone, that afternoon. Dr. Stanton shook his head, but seeing his determination, and inwardly approving its motive, he offered no further opposition, and tried to quiet the objections of prudence, by sending Thorne in the carriage, and cautioning Reuben not to jolt him on the road.

It was after sunset, when the carriage drove into the yard, upon its return. Involuntarily, Thorne leaned forward to see if there were any one watching his approach from the porch. He had never felt before, that he had here, really a *home*—where his coming was anticipated with desire. A sweet calm settled upon his heart with the thought that the welcome he hoped for, was not for this evening only; that, through days and weeks and months to come, his hours of toil would be cheered and shortened by the remembrance of the faithful friend, whose sympathy would console him in trial; in whose society he would forget fatigue, care, and discouragement.

There was a pang of disappointment, when he saw that the piazza and hall were vacant. He had a pretty picture in his mind, of fluttering white robes, and a face, whose smile of greeting was softened by a shade of solicitude, lest

he had over-exerted himself. In imagination, he had already heard the kindly phrase of welcome; the gentle reproof; the earnest inquiry how he had sped on his errand, and its effect upon his spirits. He had no right to such expectations, unless there were sister, betrothed or wife of his, within the mansion; but, like some other men, he was occasionally unreasonable, and like most unreasonable people, he was punished by the non-fulfilment of his day-dreams. He quitted the vehicle more slowly and wearily than if she had been waiting to receive him; came up the steps, and entered the hall. Should he repair to his room, or take possession of more agreeable quarters in the study, where she must seek him ere long? He wavered for a minute—and the white-robed figure, he had looked for, came flying down the stair-case.

He had it all;—the eager salutation; gratification at his safe return, and fears respecting his welfare; merry chidings, and threats of retribution which would certainly attend upon future contumacy—poured forth with girlish volubility, as she piloted him into the inner room, where was the lounge, with fresh covers of cool, white linen over its pillows, and beside it, upon a stand, a vase of roses and mignonette.

"You are spoiling me!" he said, smiling his thanks.

"That is the reward of convalescence. To deprive you of such solace as we nurses can give, would be fraud. You may esteem yourself fortunate that neither Grandpapa or Mamma is here to scold you for the imprudent length of your visit. They went, an hour ago, to visit a poor, sick woman in the country—one of mamma's pensioners. I was fearful that they would get back before you, and discover your dereliction. Are you very tired?"

"I am none the worse in body for my excursion, and easier in heart and conscience."

He told her then, that Niles had received him gratefully and penitently; had expressed what he believed was unfeigned sorrow for the unjustifiable act which had cast reproach upon the church, and a hearty desire to atone for his fault by every means in his power. He said nothing of what she learned subsequently, from other sources—how the misguided young man had wept over the bandaged hands, wounded in his behalf, if not by his very strokes, and prayed for forgiveness from the object of his unintentional violence; nothing of the faithful admonitions of the pastor, and the affectionate reassurances of the brother; of the fervent supplications, that asked pardon for the erring and strength for the weak—that were spoken beside the sick-bed.

"Then I went to see Mrs. Lewis. David is thought to be out of danger, but his recovery will be tedious. The poor mother is heart-broken. She is a good woman, and deserves to have better children. Miss Letitia favored us with her company part of the time. Will any thing ever leave an enduring impress upon her mind, I wonder? She was frivolous and conceited, as usual, this afternoon; carrying her folly and insensibility so far, as to attempt a jest upon the event that had nearly deprived her brother of life. My 'gallant and heroic act,' she was pleased to say, 'had made me a nine days' wonder. The whole transaction was a refreshing variety in these miserably stupid and uneventful times.'"

"What was your answer?"

"What such outrageous heartlessness merited—contemptuous silence. I addressed myself exclusively to Mrs. Lewis, after that; whereupon the daughter took umbrage at my neglect, I suppose, and left the room."

"That is not surprising, if your looks then were as expressive of disgust and annoyance as they are in the recollection of the tasteful compliment," said Miriam, laughingly. "One

such glance would annihilate me, I think. Had I not better leave you alone now, to recover from the effects of the interview and your ride?"

"Do not, if you please. On Monday comes the old routine of work and study. I would finish the week in this most delightful Castle of Indolence. It may be long before I can repose here again, unmolested by spectres of duties unperformed."

"You will not be fit for work in a fortnight yet. You cannot hold a pen—hardly handle a book."

"I shall preach to-morrow week, nevertheless—*Deo volente*. If I cannot prepare an extemporaneous discourse that suits me, I shall stretch the inch of indulgence you have granted me into an ell, and call upon your ready pen to commit my sermonizing to paper. What would you say to such an impertinent request?"

"That, ready or slow, my pen is at your service, and you will gratify a long-cherished curiosity of mine by initiating me into the mysteries of sermon-making. I have many brilliant thoughts—theories, novel and plausible—but they break, like soap-bubbles, when I would pin them down with a steel nib, and behold naught but blank foolscap! Significant warning! My muse swoons away at sight of an inkstand."

"Pegasus requires suitable training, like any other steed," said Thorne. "Yours has not been broken to the harness, while six years' practice has made mine as docile and as—tame as any plough-horse."

There fell between them a protracted silence, than which there could have been no surer seal of mutual ease and confidence. It is, ofttimes, these eloquent rests in lip-language, that mark the difference between the chit-chat of mere acquaintances and the talk of heart with heart. The period when politeness demanded the manufacture of conversation

has gone by. No fear lest the pause should be attributed to weariness or satiety. When heart and intellect are satisfied, there exists no necessity for keeping up appearances. Miriam sat by the window looking toward the west; the waning light in the room concentred upon her white raiment and up-turned face—the open brow, where Thorne ever read, in imagination, the motto he had bound there as a frontlet, the evening of their introduction.

He said it over to himself now with more earnest emphasis, "*Honi soit qui mal y pense!* Bright and unruffled will be the current of her life, if evil thoughts alone bring sorrowful experiences! Seclusion, and the influences of a home like this *have* made her unlike other women. Who that knows her would have it otherwise?"

He spoke aloud. "I have heard you several times singing an evening hymn to Willie—a plaintive air, that haunts me every twilight. Will you not let me hear it now?"

Miriam looked embarrassed.

"I suppose you mean the 'German Cradle Hymn,' Willie's favorite. The melody is soothing, and acts like a sedative upon the poor child's delicate nerves. This is it:

"'Gently rest! the night-stars gleam,
Soft thy slumber, bright thy dream.'"

"The air, but not the words!" interrupted Thorne. "Do you not sing an evening prayer to the same music?"

"Sometimes."

"That is what I want, unless you object to grant my request."

She sang it softly—a murmur low and sweet as the breath of an Æolian harp; hands folded and eyes cast down, she might have been a novice chanting her nightly orisons.

"It is very beautiful!" said Thorne. "Who is the author?"

She named the German composer.

"I do not mean of the music. Where did you find the words?"

"I picked them up somewhere."

"Without knowing who wrote them?"

"What a catechist you are! I do not believe that they were ever written. To the best of my knowledge, they *grew*."

"Oh! I beg your pardon. Had I surmised the truth, I would not have pressed the inquiry."

"There is Grandpapa!" Miriam started up, with an air of relief, and vanished, leaving Thorne to ponder upon his new discovery.

Her prediction of his inability to use his hands for a week or ten days, was abundantly fulfilled, and the doctor strictly forbade an attempt that might cripple them for life. The tendons were mangled, one or two in the left hand being entirely severed. They were reuniting, but there was still a doubt whether the fingers would ever recover their original power and suppleness.

Miriam was present on Tuesday, when Dr. Stanton made a minute examination of the injured members, and candidly expressed his apprehensions. It is no trifle to a man, young, and glorying in his strength, to be maimed, be it ever so slightly. For a moment, Neale stood gazing at his scarred hands, the muscles about his mouth drawn and white, a peculiarity of his countenance under strong emotion. His sisters had often declared, teazingly, that he had one pretty vanity, pride in his hands, an allegation he warmly repelled. They were rather small for one of his size, symmetrical, firm, and persistently white. He eschewed gloves, as a coxcombical appendage to masculine attire, and never shunned exposure or exercise; but the fingers retained their shapely elegance, the skin its smoothness and deli-

cacy. It was a trial to think of stiffened joints and warped sinews, of the desuetude of any portion of the frame, the Creator had formed in His own image.

The struggle soon passed. When he replied, it was to thank the friendly physician for his frankness.

"I am grateful that the worst that can befall me is no worse; that there is more hope of the right hand than of the left. It might not be so easy to secure a permanent amanuensis, as one *pro tempore*," he added, smiling at Miriam.

She was pale and shocked, her eyes full of grieving pity—mute eloquence, that sent a thrill to Neale's heart. He was not comfortless, whatever might betide him.

"Much—every thing depends upon what care you take of yourself," said Dr. Stanton. "Avoid cold, and, above all things else, keep your hands as still as possible. A sling is not an ornament to a gentleman's dress, but you must submit to wear this cross, until I give you permission to remove it. Miriam, my daughter, will you hold these fingers in the proper position, while I put on the bandages?"

She did not hang back, blushingly, or touch the terrible digits with trembling maidenly daintiness. Neale mentally repeated the legend of the order he had invested her with, as she steadied his wrist with one hand, and laid his fingers lightly upon her own palm. It was a pretty palm, he now remarked, rosy and soft, and he had never had his wounds dressed more to his satisfaction; but he was chiefly engaged, during the operation, in studying the grave countenance, whose eyes did not leave off following her grandfather's motions, until the unsightly red gashes were hidden from view.

"Now," she said, looking up into Thorne's face with her childlike earnestness, "you *will* be prudent, will you not? and let me help you, whenever I can? I will be the most silent and discreet of writing machines. Ask Grandpapa if

I am not a good librarian—an adept in handling books, turning leaves and finding references."

"I hold myself ready to certify to each and all of these accomplishments," answered the Doctor, goodhumoredly. "Unless I make a conscientious exception with respect to the silence. Taciturnity is not her forte."

"Grandpapa!"

"I should be sorry if it were, my dear. I cannot get along with these monosyllabic misses. Seriously, Mr. Thorne, it is your wisest plan to accept my granddaughter's assistance, if you are bent upon pursuing your studies. My room here is at your service. I seldom have leisure to sit in it for ten minutes in the course of the day. Miriam's duties are comparatively few, and I can answer for her that her offer of help is sincere."

Thus was the arrangement consummated that made the pair co-laborers, for two—three—four hours out of the twenty-four. That very afternoon, Miriam entered upon her duties as secretary, by writing out, as boldly and legibly as she could, the introduction of a sermon. The trifling embarrassment occasioned by the novelty of their occupation once over, both entered zealously into the spirit of the work. Neale walked slowly up and down as he dictated, and the pen followed his words obediently and in silence. An automaton would not have offered fewer interruptions to the flow of ideas; but to no automaton were ever given the soul-lit eyes, the parted lips, the flushing cheek, that bent over the sheet. Thorne caught but one glimpse of her face, and would not risk another. His brain must be unclouded, his heart fixed, his aim single.

There were numerous interruptions from the world outside of the study, and it was Thursday afternoon before the last line was written. Miriam did not wait to be thanked, before she broke forth with a store of queries, that had been

accumulating since the commencement of her task—theological, literary, and speculative. She had an eager, inquiring mind, whose thorough arousing through his means, was, to Thorne, the highest compliment he had ever received. It was a healthful stimulus to his intellect to follow the workings of hers, and frame replies, at once concise and comprehensive, to her questions; iron sharpening iron. In talking with women of ordinary calibre and training, he was often trammelled by the necessity of adapting his language to the limit of their understanding and information. With Miriam, he could speak as to a fellow-student. If a classical quotation were introduced, a prominent author referred to, an analogical simile drawn from nature or science, employed, her speaking eye or intelligent assent showed her to be as much at home upon the subject as himself. He was excited by composition, and this free conversation was just what he needed, to temper him down gradually. He still promenaded the room, stopping, now and then, in front of Miriam's chair, to enlarge upon some important point, or to give particular heed to some inquiry from her.

All at once, he noticed that she did not hear him. Her head turned in the direction of the door, and a bright smile irradiated her features. She arose, and he had just time to catch the sound of a man's step and voice in the adjoining apartment, when the middle door opened, and Parker looked in—his face one grin of delight.

"Miss Mir'um!"

"May I come in?" called a cheery voice.

Without staying for an answer, there entered a tall, fine-looking fellow, six feet high, and an inch or two to spare, with black curls and a redundant beard. Miriam ran forward.

"Max! how glad I am to see you!"

"And I you, dear Milly!"

Still holding her two hands in his, he stooped and kissed

her forehead with a tender reverence, very beautiful in the abstract—very obnoxious to the forgotten spectator of the meeting. He did not stay to have his suspicions confirmed by the glowing face Miriam turned toward the spot, where she supposed him to be still standing, to present her friend or lover.

The door leading into the hall was conveniently near, and through it Monsieur De Trop had effected a soundless retreat.

CHAPTER X.

MAX.

The white lines around Thorne's mouth were tense and rigid, as he shut himself in his chamber, and sank into the chair nearest the entrance, like one who had received a stunning blow; head bowed upon his chest, and his whole body quivering in the storm that swept over him. Then, lifting his brow, with a proud gesture, that tossed far back the shining hair, he began anew the walk interrupted below; no longer the saunter of meditative content, but a firm, heavy tread, that sought to crush out a folly, or a weakness at each step. He had told Miriam that his blood was no dull stream, and it seemed to hiss now, as it surged through his veins. Amazement and fierce displeasure deprived him, while they lasted, of capacity for rational thought. He could only walk and fight with the wrathful fires so abruptly kindled.

His unquiet wanderings had not ceased when the devoted butler brought up his supper. He preferred to take his meals alone in his room, while he was so disabled, and Parker's attentions were dexterous and assiduous. He proceeded now to pour out a cup of tea, transfer a slice of buttered toast to Neale's plate, and cut the meat from a leg of broiled chicken quickly, and without clatter. "It was a pleasure to do any thing for Mr. Thorne," he was wont to say to his compeers. "He never forgits to 'knowledge a favor."

To-night he thanked his waiter, as usual, in the kind tone he always employed in speaking to him, but it was the mere workings of the gentlemanly instinct, for he had no idea of what he was saying. Parker looked dismayed, when the untouched plate was pushed back, after Mr. Thorne had sipped his tea.

"I'm afraid your appetite is fallin' away, sir?"

"What?" asked Neale, abstractedly.

"Doesn't your supper suit you as well as common, sir? Or are you more predisposed, to-night?"

"The supper is very nice. It always is. But I am not hungry?"

"I might 'a known it!" said Parker, ruefully regarding the rejected viands.

"Known what?" Thorne frowned slightly. "There is nothing wrong in what you have brought me, only I do not happen to care about eating."

"Miss Mir'um made the blanc-mange, sir. She will be worried, if you dont touch it."

"Another time—not now!"

"Jest what always comes of my 'ficiousness," muttered the man, collecting plates and cups upon the tray, preparatory to their removal. "I couldn't wait for Miss Mir'um to come out of the parlor, to fix things for you, like she always does, but I must needs hurry up to spar' her trouble, knowing how particular engaged she was, and, in course, I've made a botch, somewhar!"

The negro's contrition was so genuine, that Neale could not be annoyed at his pertinacious efforts to force upon him the food he loathed.

"You need not trouble yourself about a sin you have not committed, my good man. No one could have prepared a more tempting meal. The fault, if there is a fault, rests with me. If any one, if Dr. Stanton should ask for

me, say that I shall not be down again this evening. I am tired, and shall retire early." He paused, then added, "There is company in the parlor, is there not?"

"No, sir—that is to say, sir, not what we would consider company, only Marster Maxwell Wilde. We look 'pon him as quite one of the family. A most promisin' and agreeable young gentleman, sir, is Mars' Maxwell. He has not been here in some several months before, and we're nat'rally overpleased to see him. He's generally here once a month, or oftener—regular, but he's been travellin' out West, I b'lieve."

There was no reply. Thorne wheeled his chair to the window, and when he was again alone, returned to his bitter fancies. But their bitterness was now all for himself—for his blindness, his stupidity, his presumption! As before the mental sight of the drowning man, pass in swift, panoramic succession, the deeds and thoughts of a long, eventful life;—so, to him, overtaken by this tide of sorrow, started up, instant and vivid, the memories of words, looks, incidents—that should have told him all he now knew, within three days of his coming to the house.

Had not Mrs. Fry assured him that no gossipping tongue would ever associate his name with Miriam's? "No one ever thinks of her as a clergyman's wife; besides—but never mind!" Could any man, unless he were the vainest of conceited dolts, require a more explicit warning? And if he had failed to catch the obvious meaning of this insinuation, there was no want of intelligibleness in Letitia Lewis's ill-bred hints and raillery about the mysterious "non-resident of Limestone." The earnest eyes, whose ingenuous depths he had so loved to fathom, might well meet his fearlessly, her demeanor and attentions be fraught with sisterly frankness, while the key to the innermost heart-chamber was in another's keeping. He was to her what he had professed to

be—a friend and brother. In deceiving himself, he had also misled her as to the real nature of his sentiments. Her innocent freedom of manner and language were the sportings of a child over a shimmering volcano. There was one consoling thought;—she was unharmed by the eruption that had rent away the deceptive crust, and laid bare the fires beneath.

From the piazza arose voices and laughter—Willie's gladsome shout and her silvery mirth, mingled with a hearty peal, that jarred him through and through. The child's clear treble, raised in eager questioning, brought a sentence to his ear.

"Milly, dear! Tom says that Cousin Max will take you away, some day. You wouldn't go with him, and leave me —would you?"

Another mirthful burst, in which Dr. Stanton's laugh was the loudest.

"Really our young gentleman is coming on!" he said, and something else, which Neale lost.

"Willie!" said Miriam, her tones broken by amusement or confusion. "Say good-night! It is past your bedtime!"

Thorne moved his chair to another window. It was not honorable to sit within hearing of family secrets. But his ear, sensitively acute, heard Miriam's light foot upon the stair, ascending slowly, to keep pace with Willie's halting tread, and her accents—fond and gentle, in reply to some question from him, as they passed through the upper hall. The familiar murmur of the evening hymn told that the day's ministry of the girl-woman to her adopted child, was nearly over, and shortly afterward, her voice again joined those of the party upon the porch.

Dr. Stanton embraced this opportunity of consigning Mr. Wilde to her care, and sought his patient's room.

"Too much study! Pulse quick and irregular! Will nothing teach youth prudence?" he pronounced. "You are just the subject for feverish debility, and the sooner you learn to spare yourself, and husband your strength, the better. Miriam has just told me that you ate no supper. Is that so?"

Thorne owned his delinquency, but promised better things for the morrow. The chance of an uninterrupted dialogue of half-an-hour, with his boarder, was a temptation the good Doctor could not easily forego. Therefore, he established himself in an arm-chair, and began to talk of divers subjects, interesting to himself, and which, he fancied, would be as agreeable to his companion.

Happy—thrice happy is he, who has never known the irritating misery of sustaining the second part in such a compulsory conversation! who knows nothing of the chafing of thoughts, pressed upward by the weight of whatever it is that preoccupies the mind, against the reluctant and struggling ideas you drag to the surface, to furnish word-material for the unready tongue; the impatient despair, that possesses your soul, in reflecting upon the possibility of a prolonged, indefinite continuance of the ordeal; the perpetual upshooting of wild exclamations, with difficulty beaten back from the escape-valve of the lips; the cold sweat and sickness of heart, that creep over you, at finding, every few minutes, that you have barely missed uttering the very last thing upon earth that you would say, were you in your proper senses. And, all this while, there sits your unwitting tormentor—intrinsically, perhaps, your best friend;—it matters not! he is, to all present intents and purposes, your worst enemy—blandly questioning; serenely attentive to your bungling, forceless sentences; narrating, with a prolixity and minuteness that fairly drive you frantic! You may, without vanity, entertain a fair opinion of

your amiability and readiness to forgive injuries, if, the next time you meet that man, you extend to him a greeting quite unembittered by recollection of wrongs inflicted, and pain endured.

Thorne appeared to hearken diligently to the apothegms and dissertations of his kind host. His obligations to him were great and numerous, and when the tenuous thread of his strained patience threatened to snap, he strengthened it by recalling some of these; thereby gaining ability to answer calmly, and seemingly with the understanding, if not the spirit; the wounded tendons tingling from the close clutch of the fingers, and the half-healed cuts throbbing hotly.

It was over at last! The doctor arose to go, and Thorne stood up, pale, patient, smiling. There was something heroic in the smile he wore, just now—the look his friends had seen oftenest upon his features, since the day he received his hurt. It was not a joyless smirk, a meaningless play of muscles, but a kindly ray for others, coming to-night from a heart that had little light for itself—an expression of good-will and cheer, undimmed by selfish griefs.

"I trust that I have not wearied you, my dear sir," said the visitor. "Company is better for you than books. You should go to sleep pretty soon, now, and think no more of that sermon until Sabbath morning. If you are languid to-morrow, do not undertake the journey down-stairs. I may seem over-prudent, but you will find out, some day, that I am in the right. Should you decide to keep your room, I should like to bring you a pleasant companion to while away the time—Maxwell Wilde, a former ward of mine—a noble, merry lad. You will find him fine company. He is a cousin of Mrs. Fry, and remotely related to myself."

Neale had never acted more insincerely than in saying, "Thank you!" to this proposition for his diversion. Instead of obeying the doctor's injunction relative to retiring, he

extinguished his lamp, and resumed his seat by the window.

It was a sultry, moonlight night, and two persons were pacing the gravel-walk bisecting the circular drive in front of the house. He did not require the evidence of the snowy robes, the straight, lithe figure, with the touch of haughtiness in its carriage, that had prejudiced him against her once—which he now thought so queenly—he needed none of these things to tell him who was the shorter and slighter of the couple. Her escort walked with uncovered head, bowed to hear, and—said Thorne's jealous heart—to see her more perfectly; and through the stillness of the place and hour, he heard their voices, confidential and tender. So bright was the moon that he could see the glitter of the bracelet upon the white arm linked within Wilde's. He dropped the curtain over a sight that fascinated, while it racked him with unutterable pangs, and sat motionless and musing until long after the promenaders' return to the house.

"And why should it not be?" he said, at length, deliberately, resolutely. "It is well that I am so soon aroused to the knowledge of my folly. I have dreamed, without knowing it; and, dreaming, fostered unwarrantable wishes, preposterous hopes. Thank God! I am awake, and I am the only sufferer! I have still my work for this life, and Heaven lies beyond!"

The breakfast, of which Parker was the elate bearer, the next morning, was plainly not of his arrangement. The centre dish of chicken, stewed in cream, was garnished with a wreath of nasturtion and curled parsley; the orange-red and light green a pleasing foil to the delicate hue of the fowl; an omelet, pale yellow, with frothy white tossed up like foam around its edge, had a parsley border of darker verdure. There were crisp biscuit and milk-toast, and smoking "egg-head;" a tiny coffee-pot, polished to the

brightness of a mirror; thick cream, that must be dipped, not poured, from the china pitcher; and beside the empty plate lay a bouquet of summer flowers. Heliotropes, darkly purple, and prodigal of vanilla fragrance, gathered from the sunniest beds,—Miriam had a passion for these "nurselings of the sun,"—half open rosebuds, white, pink, and crimson; mignonette, lavender, and geraniums were spangled with dew, that had not had time to dry, so lately had they left the parent stalks.

Thorne's cheek flushed as he beheld the floral array.

"How beautiful!" he exclaimed.

"Isn't it, sir? It takes spry fingers, and a clever head, too, for that matter, to get up things in that style. It's Miss Mir'um's work, you may be sure, sir. Anybody that can look at that waiter, sir, and then say she aint a Hartley, out and out, aint—well! he aint of *my* convictions! That's sartain!"

From which enthusiastic declaration, Thorne rightly surmised that the rival partisans of the Hartley and Stanton factions had crossed swords—figuratively speaking—that day, early as it was.

"Miss Miriam is very kind. I am much obliged to her for taking so much trouble on my account."

"And my Mistis sends her compliments, sir, and hopes you find yourself better this morning, sir."

Thorne made answer that he was, and ate what breakfast he could, in thoughtful silence. Should he go down, and beard the lion in his den? *i. e.*, meet Mr. Maxwell Wilde in the parlor, and in the presence of his lady-love, or await a formal visit from him in his castle? He decided upon the former course, as being more manly and dignified. That it was the more trying ordeal, riveted instead of unsettling the resolve.

It was ten o'clock, and Mr. Wilde still lingered about the

premises, averring all the time, that he had a "world of business" to transact, down town. Miriam was playing the prelude to a song he had asked for, and he stood behind her, ready to take his part in the vocal performance, at the moment of Neale's entrance. Miriam arose.

"Good morning, Mr. Thorne! I am happy to hear that you are better. Let me introduce you to Mr. Wilde, a cousin of our friend, Mrs. Fry, and a half-cousin of my own."

"A degree of relationship I have never heard of before," replied Thorne, exchanging bows with Mr. Wilde.

"What shall I say, then? a step-cousin, or cousin-in-law, since there is no tie of actual consanguinity?" she returned, gayly. "I have so few relations in Kentucky, that I am unwilling to give up any to whom I have the shadow of a claim."

"Doubtless! in this case, especially!" thought Thorne, with a tincture of sad acrimony. "A reluctance which is, no doubt, fully reciprocated by the relatives of dubious distance," he said aloud. "You remember the French *frère de loin?* Am I not right, Mr. Wilde?"

Mr. Wilde colored—in reality, because he had not caught the meaning of the foreign phrase; but Thorne ascribed the blush to another cause—a sense that they were verging upon a sacred topic.

"I believe you are, sir," answered Max, cautious of too decisive testimony, when he was not sure what he was talking about.

He was a fine specimen of masculine humanity; stout of limb and broad-shouldered, with a massive head and a frank, handsome countenance—offering a marked contrast to Neale, as they confronted one another. Miriam's eye took in the characteristics of both, and they became to her ever afterward, types—one of physical, the other of purely intellectual comeliness.

"Do not let me interrupt your music," pursued Neale, courteously.

"Rather join with us in the concord of sweet sounds," said Miriam, returning to the piano-stool. "As in law, every criminal is presumed to be innocent until he is proved to be guilty, I say 'sweet sounds,' until we detect discords. Mr. Thorne, will you take the base of this? Max, do you know the tenor?"

"Leaving the soprano and alto for you? Can you manage both?" inquired Max, with an effort to be at ease. Somehow, he felt constrained by "the minister's" presence.

"Not I! I can never act a double part—even in music."

"I believe you!" commented Thorne, inly and sincerely.

The quartette was not new or difficult—the favorite old air, "Meet me by moonlight alone." Max had chosen it, and he sustained himself creditably. His tenor was sweet, and tolerably accurate; still, it was the vocalization of one whose love for music exceeded his cultivation in the art. Thorne's voice was of surpassing power and melody. In speaking, or in singing, the flexible volume, as it rolled forth without apparent effort, seemed to tell of an exhaustless magazine of sound. There was never a spent or shallow note; all was round, full, and true, combining the depth of a drum-base with the resonance of a bell.

Max turned to him in unaffected admiration, at the close of the last verse.

"How grandly you sing! That is the kind of voice a man should have! Why, it balances yours, Milly! I would give my head for one like it."

"What good would the voice do you, then, rattle-pate?" cried chiding tones beside him. "No! I *won't* speak to you! Don't come near me. Wasn't it bad enough that you passed right by my gate, yesterday, without deigning a look at the house, and never came near me last night, but

you must keep me waiting on thorns and tenterhooks, all the morning, for a sight of your visage—not that it is a very delectable spectacle—only blood is thicker than water, and because you happened to have been born a Wilde, I can't break myself of a trick I have of caring for you, scapegrace though you are. Oh! you atrocious villain!"

For her cousin had deliberately picked up the diminutive scold, lifting her at arms'-length, as a child would do a doll, a hand on either side of her waist, and stood her upon the sofa.

"Now, that you are within reaching distance—rather nearer my level—I can hear and speak to you," said the handsome Hercules. "How do you do, Fan?"

He would have kissed her, but was met in the attempt by a series of rousing boxes upon his ears, that caused him to beat a disgraceful retreat.

"And then, forsooth," declaimed the indignant oratress, from her rostrum, "I trudge all the way up here, through the hot sun, and find you as cool as a cucumber and as comfortable as only a man without a conscience can be—piping a love-song! I should as soon have expected to see an elephant play the jewsharp. From what professor in Cupid's court have you taken lessons in sentimentality?"

Nowise abashed by his discomfiture in the matter of the salute, Max had remained at a respectful distance, laughing as merrily as did Miriam, at the assault and at his own defeat. His face blazed now, however, into such rapid flame, that Mrs. Fry forgot her simulated wrath in astonishment.

"Well!" she stepped from her elevation, and sat down, as one overcome and confounded. "If I had been told five minutes ago, that I should set Max Wilde to blushing, like a girl—no! girls don't blush now-a-days!—like a sheepish schoolboy—I should have contradicted the prophecy, up and down. But I have seen it, and live to tell it!"

"Who would not redden under the pelting blows you bestowed upon him?" said Miriam, looking down—a saucy smile curling the corners of her mouth. "The smart of one such is enough to bring the water to the eyes, and blood to the cheeks."

Mrs. Fry eyed her keenly. "If *you* come to the rescue, I may as well ground my arms. Mr. Thorne, how are you? Excuse me for not seeing you before, but that ingrate has engaged my eyes and thoughts—"

"And hands!" suggested Miriam.

"It is not *my* hand that he wants!" retorted Mrs. Fry. "I am afraid I have lowered my dignity in your sight, Mr. Thorne, and all through that graceless boy's pranks. I am ashamed of you, Max! the more mortified, because you feel no shame for yourself."

"Take a couple of tickets for the Valley of Humiliation!" interposed Miriam.

"When he gets tickets for two, it will not be for the Valley, nor will the second one be for me," rejoined Mrs. Fry. "He never asked me to meet him by moonlight alone. If he had, I wouldn't have done it!"

Thorne could not forbear stealing a glance at the promenaders of the preceding evening, to see whether this shot told. Max reddened more violently than before, while Miriam laughed heartily. Neale had no sympathy, and scanty patience with her undue enjoyment of the nonsense going on. Mrs. Fry had never been less amusing to him. She romped and rattled more than suited his ideas of propriety. And, for the first time, the letters of light upon Miriam's brow, visible to him alone, flickered and paled. It was a shock to his delicacy to observe that she laughed openly at allusions that brought the crimson to her lover's face, and interfered to protect him from further attack, instead of shrinking behind his shield. A more poignant conviction

intruded itself in the course of the subsequent conversation. Miriam's betrothed was, in every respect, except in mere animal beauty and strength, her inferior! He was a jovial, affectionate fellow; full of fun, jocund in laughter, kind-hearted, and neither illiterate or unrefined. Thorne met dozens of such young men every day, and liked them—liked to jest, ride, hunt, and fish with them; but there was not one of them whom he would have selected as a bosom friend, or from whose intellectual resources he ever expected to derive pleasure or profit.

"Can she be satisfied in the knowledge that he is to be her life-long companion?" he remarked, scrutinizing her animated face, as Max bandied words with his cousin, appealing to Miriam for help, when the light artillery of Mrs. Fry's ready wit got the advantage over his own heavy guns.

She had never looked prettier—more pitilessly bright—to Thorne's sad apprehension. She wore her favorite white, with rose-colored belt and breast-knot—a livery she affected, and which became her as nothing else did. The heat of the day made her dark hair glossy and wavy; her eyes danced merrily, and her cheeks were glowing with mirth and summer warmth. Were they indebted for their coloring to no more potent cosmetic? Thorne believed that he had schooled himself to contemplate her betrothal with composure, if not resignation. He had met her and her suitor calmly, and no display of womanly spite or womanly agitation had betrayed the aching heart. His prayerful hopes for her happiness had gone up to heaven from no feigned lips. She had never been his, and there was, therefore, no merit in his resigning her—but he could have done this more willingly, and with a better grace, to a man who was her peer in intelligence and education. Few could equal her in original characteristics.

"Can she be content? Does she not recognize the want of congeniality, the incongruity between her nature and his? Is her heart full? Are there no unquiet yearnings, no sickening misgivings, screened by that joyous mien, or is her delusion, as yet, as complete as it seems to be?"

And tortured imagination ran forward to the awakening—sure and fearful—from this fallacious dream of girlhood; the grief, disappointment, anguish of the discovery; the struggle between duty and the growing distaste of the association to which she was bound; the gloomy, weary, loveless existence stretching before her—for hers was not a spirit or mind to stoop—not even to adapt herself to her husband's level, were it lower than hers. Where were Dr. Stanton's loving perceptions, that they did not detect all this, and his authority hold back his beloved grandchild from certain misery? Was Mrs. Hartley dreaming, and could cousinly partiality hoodwink Mrs. Fry to the monstrous evil of furthering such an alliance?

"We are talking Mr. Thorne to death! He is as pallid as a ghost, and grave as a Quaker tombstone!" was the exclamation that tore through the veil of melancholy fancies.

Miriam turned quickly. "Are you then suffering more than usual? What can I do for you?"

"Nothing—thank you!" His voice sounded husky to him, and he cleared it. "I am feeling stronger every day, Mrs. Fry, and am quite ashamed that I have created such a sensation by what was, in reality, so trivial a matter. I hope to be entirely myself next week."

Mrs. Fry's reply was a pressing invitation to dinner at her house that day. Max and Miriam were to be there—nobody else. Why could not he join their family party?

That he *would* not was evident from his politely-positive declinature, and since this was his determination, it was hardly just in him to be secretly wounded that Miriam coun-

tenanced him in his refusal, and begged Mrs. Fry not to tempt him to an act that might imperil his health. Her motive was simple kindness—a desire to spare him further importunities, and to leave him to the exercise of his own pleasure; but the green-eyed demon whispered that he would be the sole obstacle to the dinner-company's being, in truth, a family party.

They all went off together, and Thorne betook himself to his room, where he read Hebrew for one hour, Greek for another, and the dryest treatise upon theology that his library furnished, until dinner-time.

He was sitting upon the piazza, with Dr. Stanton, that afternoon, when a buggy drove up to the door, and a gentleman sprang out. It was Mr. Lee, whom the reader may recollect as one of those who had taken offence at Neale's being included in the hunting party, and had afterward avowed the vanquishment of their prejudices. His errand now was to invite Mr. Thorne to ride with him. His reasons for this, in him, extraordinary request, were threefold. Primarily, he relished and desired the society of him whom he had dubbed "the prince of good fellows;" secondly, aware that Thorne had an eye for the fine points of a horse, he felt sure that he would enjoy a turn behind the splendid nag he had lately purchased; and thirdly, he knew that he should be in his glory, while showing off the said animal to the "only parson he ever saw who could tell a horse from a mule." The proposal brought no pleasure to Neale, in his wearied, distraught state of feeling, but he did not dream of doing aught save accepting the offer.

"You were pretty badly cut up!" remarked Lee, in respectful sympathy, seeing that Thorne stepped into the vehicle, without laying hold of the side or foot-board to assist in his ascent.

"Not seriously. It is more inconvenient than painful. I

have to be cautious while the tendons are reuniting. It would not be pleasant, you know, to climb the ladder of life with stiff fingers."

"I should think not, indeed!" Lee's own clutched the ribbons with involuntary force at the thought. "I am sorry, and so is every body else, that you came to hurt in trying to save those hair-brained boys. A little blood-letting would have done them good, and you did not need it."

"Perhaps a *little* blood-letting would have been salutary, as you say. The difficulty is, that doctors of their sort are apt to be more free with their ugly lancets than are those who are licensed to kill. As a friend to the legitimate profession and a foe to irregular phlebotomy, I interfered."

"You showed astonishing pluck in doing it. I have heard men command the peace almost as loudly before, but they always kept at a respectful distance from the danger while they did it. About five years ago—just after Lewis was elected mayor—we had a terrific fight here one court-day. It began between Harry Hartley and a notorious bully and blackguard named Wilson. They were close friends generally—more intimate than was for Harry's good—but on this day they had been drinking and playing for high stakes, and Hartley, having the worst of it, accused the other of cheating. Wilson gave him the lie, and at it they went, with pistols and bowie-knives, and fought like madmen. Harry was thrown at last, and Willie Bent, his brother-in-law, dashed in to help him, and a crony of Wilson's—a fellow-gambler—went in for him, and so on, until there were about a dozen wrestling and shooting and cutting at one another. It was the most exciting scene I ever beheld. Nobody dared try to stop it, for fear of being murdered among them all. Presently up comes our new mayor, with two new constables at his back—brimful of zeal for law and order. He mounted a horse-block on the corner and read

the riot act, in a loud, pompous voice, then stretched out both hands over the crowd:

"'Fellow-citizens! I do—ah—beseech you—'

"At that second, whiz! went a pistol-ball within half a yard of his ear.

"'Murder!' he roared, and tumbling—he was too fat to jump off the block, he squatted down behind it.

"Every body saw him, and every body roared with laughter. Even some of the fellows who were fighting caught the contagion, and joined in the cheer for the mayor. The end of the matter was, that this devoted officer stopped the battle, although not in the way he designed. A man does not feel like fighting and laughing at the same time."

Thorne laughed—but not very heartily. It pained him to hear the name of Miriam's dead brother introduced in such a connection. He changed the subject by speaking admiringly of the spirited animal, who was now taking the road in fine style—a swift, long trot, that caused trees, houses, and fences to fly backward with dizzying rapidity. His owner broke off in the middle of an enthusiastic enumeration of his treasure's miraculous qualities, at the spectacle of an open barouche upon the turnpike before them.

"There are Fry's crack grays, that his wife boasts can out-trot any thing in Limestone or Christendom! She is a pretty sharp judge of a horse, too! better than her husband. He bought that span to please her. And Max Wilde is driving! Capital! Many's the time we have driven against one another down this bit of road. What will you bet—I beg your pardon, Mr. Thorne! I mean, have you any objection to a friendly trial of speed?"

"None. I should enjoy it—provided the consent of the ladies is gained in advance," replied Neale, conversant with the custom of the region, and, it may be, not unwilling to distance Max, in one way at least.

It was not as practicable to get within hearing of the ladies as might have been supposed. At the clatter of horse's hoofs behind them, the grays were off like a shot, bowling the double-seated carriage along the smooth highway, with as much ease as did Firefly—Lee's trotter—the lighter load he carried. At a word from his master, Firefly started in pursuit, spurning the dust and stones in clouds.

"Ahoy, there!" halloed Lee. "Hold up!"

The foremost driver reined in the impatient animals, and allowed the speaker to come alongside. The barouche held, as Thorne had supposed, the family-party; Mrs. Fry and Miriam upon the back seat—Mr. Fry and Max in front. All appeared to be in jubilant spirits, Mrs. Fry not waiting for Lee's proposition, but instantly challenging him to show the speed of his celebrated courser.

"He is too long-bodied, and I am much mistaken if he is not tender-footed, from the way he steps," she criticised, surveying him with the eye of a practised horse woman.

Miriam shook her head. "There are beauty, speed, and mettle there, Fanny! Don't beat us too badly, Mr. Lee!"

"Beat us!" Mrs. Fry was insulted—outraged! "See, how he blows already—and the foam on his mouth, while my ponies have not laid a hair! They could trot around him in a mile. I don't believe in your elephantine trotters. What they gain in size they lose in quality."

Lee tried very hard not to seem affronted by these strictures, while he proposed a test-trot, generously giving the grays the start.

It was a close race for the first half-mile. The road was broad and even, and much of the time the vehicles were abreast, the horses pressing hard upon the bit; the spokes

flashing in the sunshine like solid, shining circles; the riders excited and silent; the drivers leaning forward, eager eyes fixed upon the rival racers, and set teeth showing whitely between the parted lips.

(Quere: why *must* men invariably show molars, incisors, and cuspids, while driving at 2.40 speed?)

Then, a low whistle was hissed to Firefly's ear, and the gallant creature slightly depressed his head — the body, whose length Mrs. Fry had pretended to censure, was broadened and shorter, and he went to work in earnest—as Lee afterward boasted, "throwing the milestones behind him, like so many pebbles." The rein was not slackened until he had put so great a distance betwixt him and his competitors as to preclude the chance of being overtaken.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Lee, in high glee. "We are even now, Master Max! He beat me ignominiously at our last bout, six months ago."

"You have had a complete revenge; have demonstrated Firefly's supremacy over all the stables of Limestone, if not of Christendom. The grays did their best. Mr. Wilde got all the speed out of them they could muster."

"Yes! I saw that. Max is a No. 1 whip, and a first-rate fellow. He can afford to lose a petty triumph of this description, since he has had one so much more important, recently. You know he is to be married next month?"

"I had not understood that it was to be so soon."

Bands, tight and tightening, clasped his throat and heart.

"About the middle of September. Wyndham told me this morning. He is to be one of the groomsmen, so there is no mistake about his evidence in the case. There is no reason why it should be kept secret any longer. Wyndham represents Max as nearly deranged with happiness. Poor fellow!

he has been very brave and constant, under the difficulties that have beset him."

"There have been difficulties, then?" remarked Thorne, with forced calmness. "Of what nature—may I ask?"

"Not on the part of the young lady, you may be sure. She has been attached to Max ever since they were children, and, being a spunky girl, has always vowed that she would never give him up. Her family objected to him because he was not rich, and another suitor, as persevering as he is, is the wealthiest man in the county. They hold their heads very high, and require a golden bit and check-rein, to keep them up. But the poor girl fell sick at last, from her trials and persecutions, and her mother, thinking she was going to die, relented and promised, that if she recovered, she should not be opposed any longer. Of course when this premium was offered for convalescence, she recovered rapidly, and I am told that her friends have reconciled themselves to the prospect of the marriage, with commendable facility. Then, too, Dr. Stanton came up handsomely to the mark;—a thing no one had a right to expect, but Max was once his ward, and seems like a son to him. He offers to settle a fine farm, with fixtures, upon the young couple—so Pluto does not frown, while Cupid smiles."

"I thought you intimated that Dr. Stanton opposed the match," said Thorne, intensely mystified by this narrative.

"Oh, no! He was indignant at the idea that Max was not thought good for any woman, whether he had money or not. So great a favorite is he in the family, that half of the people hereabouts believe that he is engaged to Miss Miriam Hartley."

Firefly was walking slowly, cooling off after his late heat, tossing his head up and down, and shaking the foam over his swelling breast, with the air of a conqueror—but to Thorne,

the trees and fences flew past more dizzily than ever. There were hollow noises, like roaring flames or rumbling wheels, in his ears—mists floating before his sight—still, through and above all, a sense of such exquisite relief, surprise and rapture, as he had never known before. He could not have spoken; he did not move;—only strove from bewilderment, to eliminate the true meaning of these last words—from vagueness, to shape realization.

Lee went on, without noticing the effect of his revelation, totally ignorant, indeed, that he had revealed any thing of moment to his companion.

"Even Mrs. Fry, his cousin, was in the dark until to-day. Max could hardly tell Wyndham the story, for laughing. You see the friends of this Miss Galt, kept the engagement very secret, in the hope of finally breaking it off, and Max was too proud to proclaim it, in the circumstances. Dr. Stanton's family knew it. Miss Miriam was a schoolfellow of the bride that is to be, and the confidante of both parties. Still, they did not think it best to tell Mrs. Fry the exact posture of affairs. She is a clever, kind-hearted little lady, but not over discreet, and they never contradicted her, when she insinuated that Miss Miriam would, some day, be her cousin. She scolded at a fine rate, when she was undeceived. Miss Miriam undertook the task. Max did not dare go to Fry's without her. But her wrath was soon spent, and she is quite delighted at the match, although, I suspect, less pleased than if her plan had been carried out, and Max wedded Miss Hartley, instead."

Max and Miriam were pacing the porch, when Thorne alighted, and they received the brightest of bright smiles in response to their welcome.

"You cannot know how much good this ride has done me!" said Neale, warmly, to Mr. Lee. "I am a new man!"

"What a social, merry fellow your parson is, Milly!" observed Max, after Thorne had left the parlor that night. "He talks as well as he sings, and does both with all his heart. This morning, I was sure I should never get along with him—he was so frostily polite. But I have changed my opinion."

So had Mr. Thorne.

CHAPTER XI.

"OH, SUMMER NIGHT!"

THREE August weeks—weeks of fervid sunshine and harvest moons—had passed since the memorable Sabbath, in which the young pastor reappeared in his pulpit, after his fortnight's seclusion; paler and thinner, and wearing one arm in a sling, but with a soft light in his dark-blue eye; a wondrous beauty of expression mantling, with color and warmth, the wasted lineaments; a persuasive melody in his voice, that won for him every eye and ear and thought. It was no mean proof of innate nobility of character, that this newborn emotion, this love, that had taken hold of the very depths of his being, so far from rendering him indifferent to his kind, and careless of his work, quickened benevolence and zeal. From the heart, flooded with great and unlooked-for happiness, sprang up, in thank-offering, a harvest of holy desires and ardent resolves.

It is a grand thing to see a God-fearing soul, that has been stricken with sore affliction, bearing its cross, not only meekly, but bravely; devoting every moment of time and every power of body and spirit to the service of the Chastener, saying to Sorrow—"Thou art my sister!" to Adversity—"Thou, my teacher!" to Toil—"And thou, my consoler!" These are the men for whom Danger has no dissuasives and Death no dreads; the fountains, encased in blasted cliffs, to whose sides no verdure clings, yet which send to the valleys below, health, fertility, refreshment.

Still, are there not many to whom suffering has taught disinterestedness, who would, but for this discipline, have been contented to bask, not thanklessly, but indolently, and because idly, therefore selfishly—in the sunshine of prosperity? It is harder to be up and doing, when the perfumed airs of Beulah fan the brow, or the foot sinks in the velvet sward, and the frame is enervated by the voluptuous atmosphere of the Enchanted Land, than when the Hill of Difficulty towers in front, and through the gathering shades of evening, there come goblin whispers in the rear. That soul is gallant and true, high in tone and aim, that, clasping the choice gifts of Heaven—the choicest of all earthly blessings, Hope and Love, to its bosom; wearing them there, fondly and proudly, yet holds on its upward way, "without haste—without rest."

Upon many people—worthy in their way, perhaps—gratitude for prayers answered and good bestowed, seems to act like soothing-syrup. They ask nothing more they say, in pious placidity, than to spend the remaining years of their lives in returning thanks for the innumerable mercies conferred upon them—unprofitable servants! Quiet, sleepy saints, they sit within their nests of ease, and twitter psalms of praise that delight themselves and disturb no one else—and the world moves on, bringing nearer and nearer, the judgment of deeds, as well as of words! Life is *action!* a battle-field, where, than "perpetual praise" and "perpetual prayer" no better watch-words can be sounded—but the best warrior is he who bends the knee at the cannon's side, in the hush that preludes the shock of combat, and shouts the pæan of thanksgiving as lustily above the din and hurly-burly of the charge, as when the red field is won.

Three weeks of work abroad, and restful joy at home; of growing confidence and affection, ripening into the assurance of reciprocation. Neale and Miriam rarely appeared

in public together, unless when invited to the same house, and then, Mrs. Hartley usually accompanied her daughter. His engagements were numerous and important, and by tacit consent, his life, beyond the shelter of Dr. Stanton's roof-tree, was given up to others than the inmates of that dwelling. Except an occasional ride or walk, taken in company, nothing had transpired to draw the attention of gossiping circles to their intimacy. In-doors, theirs was already, in many respects, a joint existence. They read, wrote, sang and talked in unison or harmony, like well-attuned keys of the same instrument. There was no formal "love-making." Oh, profanation of Love's spontaneity, and the heart's generous growth of best fruits! The word was never named between them; but neither was there, any longer, the use of the pretty, delusive epithets of brother and sister. They called themselves "friends" still, and Thorne was willing that this convenient screen should, for a brief space, hide from Miriam his real designs, and veil from her inspection her own heart.

Frank and free she was, as ever; her demeanor as cordial, as replete with true modesty and as destitute of prudery; and brighter, each day, to his spiritual sight, grew the frontlet between the clear eyes. If there were seasons, when as she listened or talked to him, with that meditative, downcast gaze no other woman could have made so charming and suggestive; as he watched the rapid play of feeling and thought—soul-flashes, chasing one another across her features—his heart glowed more warmly, and a thrill ran through his pulse at the anticipation he hardly dared indulge, of the moment in which he should summon to that cheek and brow the vivid hue of feelings, far deeper and as yet unknown, and for the first time, his lips bear the golden legend company—if he yielded momentarily to this intoxicating dream, he was sufficiently master of himself to curb

the impulse that urged him to hasten that day of fruition. She must be wooed before she was won, and that wooing, it suited his ideas of right and delicacy, to make gradual; to lead her on by imperceptible degrees, to know, trust, and if he could, to love him. When he told her how dear she was to him, it should be at such time and in such fashion, as should not surprise, much less alarm her.

Supper was over, one lovely evening, in the last week of August. Miriam had put Willie to bed, and now sat upon the upper step of the west porch, watching the kindling of the stars overhead, and the army of fire-flies rising from the garden, and singing softly to herself, as she gazed. The night was warm, but not oppressive—the heat that disposes one to quiet, rather than languor. The porch was overrun with honeysuckle, and the dry air absorbing only the more active aroma of the blossoms, was spicily fragrant, instead of being laden with cloying sweets. It was a meet hour and scene for a maiden's fancies, and the uncertain visions of the watcher, shapeless as mist, sweet and subtle as the odors distilled by the thousand flower-bells around her, were so enticing that she tarried under the open sky—she would have said, to commune with Nature—and with Nature was her communion held—but not that phase of the Holy Mother's works which was revealed in the outer and visible world. If the "quiet loves of bird and flower" were not forgotten, they were outranked by other emotions, resembling them, it might be, but in such degree as the eternal stars above bore likeness to the glow-worm's fire.

Her song betrayed naught of this inner life. The queen of the fairies might have warbled it, from the gilded divan of a lily's heart.

"Oh, Summer Night!
How softly bright,

How sweet the bower,
Where sleeps the cradled flower!
The light gale hies
To rock her bed,
And scatter dew around her head."

She repeated the witching, fantastic melody in all its variations, two or three times. She had no human auditors, and it pleased her fancy to regale her dream-company with a serenade. They enjoyed it, and she obeyed their "encore." It was hot in parlor and study, and there were artificial lights there—mere oil and wick, in process of combustion. Books were unsympathizing companions, and instrumental music an arbitrary arrangement of ivory slips and twisted wires—all too commonplace and material for a thought-fête, on such a night. So, she sat there, until the swift-footed minutes accumulated into an hour, and still, at intervals, snatches of song formed themselves upon her lips:

"Sweet flower—good-night!
Thy beauty's spell will charm thee,
Lullaby!"

She did not sing the ensuing lines alone. A dark shape emerged, unheard, from the door behind her, and sat down upon the step; round, deep, bass notes bore up hers into fuller sound:

"No stormy winds shall harm thee,
Lullaby!
Sweet flower, good-night!
Sweet flower, good-night! Good-night!"

Neale hummed the refrain over to himself, before he spoke.

"Why don't you ask me whether I dropped from the clouds, or sprang out of the earth?" he said, at length.

"Because I knew you would tell me, without my troubling myself or you with questions."

"Am I so uniformly communicative then?"

"When it is right that you should be. I did not expect you back so early, however. Have you had a pleasant evening?"

"Yes—rather. I came away, about an hour after tea, out of consideration for Mrs. Niles's age and primitive habits, and Robert's weak state. He gains strength but slowly. I did contemplate a call at Mr. Marton's, but—shall I confess it? After my hand was upon the bell-knob, I chanced to glance at the parlor windows. The sash was raised, the shutters flung wide, and whom should I behold, seated in a neighborly confabulation with Mr. and Mrs. Marton, but your mother and grandfather?"

"Yes—they set off upon quite a round of visits, directly after supper. The loveliness of the evening tempted them abroad, and duty prescribed the direction they ought to take."

Neale continued. "I left the bell unrung; withdrew my fingers cautiously from the knob, and myself as cautiously from the door, for I opined that you would be the warder of the castle, unguarded except by the sable retainers, during the absence of your seniors. I entered by the front hall; went up to my room, exchanged my boots for slippers, and guided by the music, presented myself, unbidden, in your bower. Is my record satisfactory?"

"I shall not disfigure it by black lines. Is not this the perfection of summer weather? Do you observe that the stars shine with faintly-colored light—a phenomenon, seldom beheld north or south of tropical, or rather equatorial regions. Fancy our 'star of strength,' our 'red planet,' Mars, no longer distinguishable by his flaming crest, among his many hued brethren! The sight must be gorgeous."

"I prefer the dear old home-stars, in the dress they have always worn to me. Yonder comes the moon to dispute their reign—red and wrathful of visage as Mars himself!"

Inflamed and sullen, she rested her cheek upon the tree-tops and sent lurid glances over the landscape; then calming and clearing as she arose, commenced her walk through the star-sown heavens—the type of majestic purity and peace.

The two friends soon forgot to watch her motions. Never at a loss for topics when they were together, each felt to-night, that thoughts and words had never before flowed so easily and happily. Their tones, animated in the beginning, insensibly to themselves, became subdued, yet more expressive, and their discourse dived further into the heart's deep things than they had ever suffered it to go before.

Said a pattern damsel to me once—not in condemnation or disapproval—but as a statement of an immutable law of enlightened human nature: "Introduce a young lady to a young gentleman, and leave them to an hour's unrestricted conversation, and you may depend upon finding, at the end of that time, that they have discussed the subject of Love in all its bearings, and interchanged well-digested theories concerning that all-important, most interesting theme—Matrimony."

She was prime authority in these matters, and her practice conformed precisely with her doctrine. Her dissertations upon Love mutual, Love unrequited, and Love rejected, were able, and bestowed at every convenient opportunity upon inquirers of the opposite sex. But should this humble volume be extant, when her daughters—now babies—are grown to girlhood's estate, I know that she will—if they are allowed to peruse its yellow pages—supply an antidote for the bane of Miriam's example, in the form of a motherly lecture upon the manifest impropriety of holding such dialogues, by the light of the moon, upon an equalizing door-step, with no chaperone within hail. And, since I have digressed to this social Lycurgus in crinoline, I cannot re-

frain from adding another section from her code, which may be of use to some trembling devotee of the Juggernaut, "They-Say."

"I make it a rule, my dear, never to talk with a gentleman, with the parlor-door shut."

"Not even in winter?" questioned I, blankly.

"Never! unless there are others present. Better freeze, than peril one's self-respect! These men are apt to take advantage of the least laxity of etiquette in such affairs. It is not safe!"

Miriam saw not the shadow of evil in the closed door or the moonlight *tête-à-tête*, and would have declined the acquaintance of any *gentleman* with whom she could not feel "safe," in these, or any other circumstances which were liable to occur in everyday life. But she was so unsophisticated as to deem the thought and name of Love's mystic seal—Marriage—too holy to be discussed as a matter of personal interest by parties who met as strangers, and as strangers parted; made the jest of an idle hour, prated of as lightly and unreservedly as one might describe a new style of bonnet. It was not her wont to say, "When *I* marry, I shall do so and so;" "If Providence ever blesses me with a husband, you will see how I shall manage," and the like phrases, that were current among other marriageable girls of the region. If she had ever had an offer, not even her mother knew it. She had no bosom friend, to whom the momentous secret must be confided before the words of the declaration were cold upon her ear. Still less was it her habit to try each fresh masculine acquaintance upon the matrimonial block—the "dummy," to be found among the imaginary stock of most young ladies. Yet she, too, had her ideal, and would not have shamed to own it to one who had a right to ask questions upon the subject.

She leaned now against a pillar of the porch; her hands

laid tightly upon one another; looking out toward the horizon, and around her mouth hovered a half-smile of gentle content or happy musings. While they smiled, her lips murmured, scarcely louder than a musical whisper, the strain forever after linked with the memory of that hour:

"The bud reposes,
Her veil she closes;
The gale sighs round
With softer sound;
Sweet flower—good-night!"

No! there had been no word of love, no hint of betrothal or union, and she sang her lullaby in the artless glee of a spirit untroubled by premonition of any coming change; a serenity widely at variance with the tumultuous thoughts tossing in the brain of him who sat beside her, outwardly as composed as herself.

"Why wait longer for certainty of bliss, or assurance of misery?" was Thorne's inward query. He had read her nature to the last leaf, and laid his bare for her perusal. He doubted no more that she was the predestined mate for his soul, his helpmate and comfort through life, than he doubted the existence and love of the heart swelling and longing within his bosom. When should he find again such propitious conjunction of circumstance, hour and feeling?

For one moment, after he had taken his resolve to risk all upon the irrevocable words of the next, a cold hand seemed to be laid heavily upon the heaving breast, and stilled its beatings; the horror of suspense overwhelmed him, and his tongue refused to do his will. What was lost or gained by that little minute, eternity alone could tell. Spurning the craven hesitancy, he ventured to lift one of the hands from her knee.

"Miriam!"

His tone thrilled with passionate emotion, and he had but

time to mark that she ceased her song, and turned toward him, with a startled look, and sudden blush of surprise or suspicion.

"Miriam!" echoed other voices. "Miriam! child! where are you?"

"Here, Mamma! here I am, Grandpapa!"

She flitted past him, and the secret was still his!

He did not follow her into the house for half an hour. When he did, he found the family assembled in the parlor, and, seated upon the sofa holding fast one of Mrs. Hartley's hands, was a trim little lady, attired in a travelling-dress.

"My niece, Miss Clarice Stanton, Mr. Thorne," said the Doctor.

Neale bowed, and would have ended the ceremony there, but the trim woman arose, advanced, and offered him four tiny fingers, smiling primly but engagingly.

"I cannot receive Mr. Thorne as a stranger. There have been so many and such kind things said and written respecting him, to me, by my Limestone friends, that I feel as if I had known him long and well."

Thorne took the wee bit of a hand and bowed again, with a convenient "Thank you."

What else can a sincere man say and do, when a lady compliments him at first sight? He waited to see her reseat herself, and chose for his own accommodation a chair near Miriam. His eyes were ready and vigilant to note distinctive traits of character and deportment, and her style of tripping back to her place; the straight lines described by her decorous draperies, in falling into fold—a touch sufficing to arrange them about her as she sat down; the erect spine; the crimped frills of her collar and cuffs; above all other signs, the corkscrew curls, twisted tight and smooth as pine shavings; and the precisely-puckered mouth, modelled, it was impossible not to believe, according to Mrs. General's

celebrated rule of "prunes and prisms"—these were surely warrant sufficient and unmistakable for his inaudible ejaculation—"An old maid!"

I am sorry to relate aught that may disparage our hero in the eyes of an exceedingly respectable, and, so far as I can determine, indispensable portion of the community; but if there were an object upon earth of which Mr. Thorne had a nervous horror, it was the *genus* ancient spinster—as he expressed it, "those who were old maids from necessity." That there were many noble and loveable exceptions to this class, among elderly single ladies—ornaments to their sex and benefactors to their race—he cheerfully acknowledged, glorying in the fact that he classed a few such among his most loved and honored friends. For the benefit of these, he was in favor of instituting an honorable degree, conferring upon them the title of "Mrs." when they had passed a certain age. For the rest, his most charitable sentiment was amiable pity—not (let us do him the justice to say) that they had never married, but because they had learned, in their years of lonely pilgrimage, to be captious and finical; were wedded to dogmas and whims; repining at their compulsory singlehood, and often poorly concealing a frantic ambition to exchange it for the hand and name of the "Anybody," prayed for by the desolate virgin of the fable, and soured to crab-apple vinegarness because their traps were growing rotten and unserviceable, in their yawning emptiness.

"Cousin Clarice," as most of her acquaintances called her, was very short of stature, a head lower than Miriam, straight as a ramrod, and well-nigh as unbending. A wasp-like waist; infinitesimal hands and feet; gray-blue eyes, that were not amiss in size and shape; a tolerable nose and skin; a mouth that Nature meant should be of moderate breadth, if not somewhat large—a design frustrated, in the course of time,

by the diligent use of the draw-string of spinsterly propriety; a pointed chin, and dark tresses, thinned by the ungallant years that waylay and disfigure unfortunate woman after she passes milestone No. 30, on the top of the hill—these completed the inventory of her personal charms. She had a clear, thin voice, and clipped her words in speaking; mild, seraphic seriousness brooded over her visage, when at rest; her smile was gratuitous and stereotyped, and her manner of listening a clever counterfeit of absorbed interest—flattering deference.

"I have taken my dear uncle and cousins by surprise, I find," she said to Neale, apologetically. "I am at a loss to conceive why the letter I dispatched, a week since, to apprise them of my intention to pay my annual visit to this beloved old homestead, has not reached them. Yet I was hardly disappointed, upon my arrival at the Dépôt, to find no one awaiting me, for I appreciate the many and unexpected calls upon uncle's valuable time, and my escort kindly procured me a carriage. You may imagine the surprise of these dear friends, upon encountering me and my baggage at the outer gate."

"I am very sorry that your letter miscarried," said Mrs. Hartley; "it would have given us pleasure to drive down for you. It is unpleasant for a lady to come into Limestone by the evening train, unless there is some one there to meet her."

"Now, my dearest cousin, you positively shall not expend another sigh upon so trivial a circumstance!" exclaimed Cousin Clarice, squeezing Mrs. Hartley's hand with fervor. "Have I not said that it was not even a disappointment? I am here, safe and happy, and what does it matter whether a shabby hack or Reuben's irreproachable equipage brought me? I know the worth of uncle's time, and that our good Reuben does not relish exposing his horses to the night air."

Mrs. Hartley desisted from excuse or explanation, but she appeared uncomfortable. Somehow, in the face of the self-evident facts of the case (the impossibility of reading, and complying with a request contained in a letter that never came to hand), Cousin Clarice made it manifest that she was an angelic martyr, and Reuben's master and mistress conspirators with him in a plot to slight her.

"Neglect me as you will," her smile and tone seemed to say. "From my hands shall be meted out to you good for evil."

"My cousin Miriam has just related to me the thrilling narrative of your recent exhibition of bravery, and the terrible disaster that befell you while engaged in your work of mercy," continued she, addressing Thorne. "I grieve that your heroism should be so basely rewarded."

Neale's side-glance at Miriam, as her name was mentioned, crossed a ray of surprise and annoyance darted at the speaker; and he could not deny himself the pleasure of giving her a look of tranquillizing intelligence, to inform her that he understood what part of the "narrative" was hers, and what it owed to the translator.

"The 'terrible disaster' was comprised in a few scratches, for which I am none the worse to-day, Miss Stanton," he said, politely but formally.

"I am indeed thankful that it is so! Every friend of peace and religion must honor you for the moral courage that strengthened you to set at defiance public opinion, in vindication of right. It was a hazardous experiment in a stranger—this bold condemnation of established usages; but I suppose you were not aware how dissimilar the views of this community with regard to duelling and self-defence were to those of the more refined and aristocratic Marylander. I rejoice to learn that this event has not diminished your popularity in the neighborhood, or weakened your influence among your people."

The object of this affable patronage—this bitter-sweet compound, so smoothly delivered—was blessed with the gift of a pair of expressive eyes, and they settled themselves upon this pocket edition of womanhood in a positive stare, that caused Miriam to turn away her head, to conceal the effect of the look upon her risibles. Incredulity, disdain, and amusement, were oddly mingled with the strugglings of native politeness, restraining him from answering a fool according to her folly, when that fool happened to be a lady, and the relative of his host.

Dr. Stanton felt and looked irritated.

"You underrate Mr. Thorne's standing with his people and neighbors, and do them injustice in insinuating the possibility of any unhappy moral results from the occurrence you deplore. We are not exactly barbarians, Clarice, nor totally deficient in appreciation of a right and brave action."

"My dearest uncle! how can you suppose me capable of intimating such an absurdity? If I apologized to Mr. Thorne for the slight moral obliquities that may strike him upon a first acquaintance with his new home, it was only because I was apprehensive lest he should be disheartened. And I do not question that, as you imply, the character of the Limestone population has undergone a change for the better, that decency and law have gained a marked ascendency over bellicose rowdyism, within four years."

There was a point to this allusion, which would have been lost upon Thorne, prior to his hearing Lee's story of the great fight, wherein the Mayor distinguished himself, and Harry Hartley was the ruling spirit. As it was, he noticed and sympathized with Miriam's indignation, as testified by the blood sweeping darkly up to her temples, and Dr. Stanton's wince of pain or displeasure. Even gentle Mrs. Hartley colored, and raised her eyes in mild wonder and appeal to the bearer of this concealed weapon.

"I see that you are weary with your journey—quite out of sorts, in fact, Cousin Clarice," remarked Miriam, with dry significance. "We will have prayers immediately, and not keep you up."

Neale followed up the motion so promptly that Cousin Clarice's affirmation that she was willing to await the convenience and pleasure of the rest, was but half audible, and there was no time for a reply before he began to read.

"Where she is not allowed to wheedle and patronize, she stings!" Thorne epitomized the master-traits of the new arrival, at bidding her "good night."

Other people had known her for more years than he had lived in the world, and not understood her so well. He had made another discovery—and this ought, by right, to have the precedence, in naming the two—Miriam disliked this affectionate relation more than she did any other person with whom he had seen her in association. Not Letty Lewis's impertinence had fired her eye and compressed her lips, as he had observed them to-night. He noticed, moreover, that she had not said one syllable save in response to a direct inquiry, until she made the suggestion that ended the uncomfortable conference, and the curtness, verging upon asperity, of her tone was not lost upon him.

"Breakers ahead!" he soliloquized, in his chamber. "Even in this peaceful sea of domestic happiness, there are reefs, it seems."

Had he appreciated the real nature and the extent of this one, his jest would have been exchanged to saddest earnestness, and his sleep been less sound that night.

CHAPTER XII.

COUSIN CLARICE.

THORNE dallied with a cigar upon the piazza, and among the flower-beds, the following morning, in the hope of getting a minute's speech with Miriam before going to the study. Not that he designed to continue in the broad, unromantic sunshine, especially directly after that most prosaic of all meals—breakfast—the interesting story he had begun amid the friendly influences of music, moonlight, and flowers. But he did wish to carry with him through the day the remembrance of a smile or word, which should testify that he had not shocked or offended her, and he was curious—more than curious—anxious, to see whether she had taken in any thing of the meaning of his unfinished sentence.

Presently Dr. Stanton joined him, hat and stick in hand.

"You are going to walk into town, then, sir?" said Thorne. "You will find the heat oppressive, I fear, before you have gone far."

The Doctor hemmed and hawed, and, for an instant, appeared as awkward as a man of his age and breeding could do.

"No, sir—I am not going into Limestone—at least, not at present. My niece wishes me to walk a short distance with her."

Here Cousin Clarice tripped from the house, "gotten up" in a white muslin, covered to the hem of the skirt by an extensive cloak or mantle of black bombazine; a black barege

hood shading her face, which Thorne imagined had been treated to a dressing of pearl powder or chalk, to heighten the effect of this whimsical mourning suit, and drawing on a pair of stiff, new, black kid gloves.

"I am quite ready, dear Uncle!" she sighed, in pathetic modulations, every feature decked in meekest Christian woe.

The Doctor offered his arm, silently—almost sheepishly—and they set off down the walk leading to the orchard.

Thorne had a keen, irresistible sense of the ridiculous, and this miniature pageantry of funereal pomp brought to recollection an anecdote he had once heard of a negro, who, with crape weepers flaunting from his hat and arm, paced solemnly down the sidewalk, carrying a small coffin under his arm. One of his compeers, unawed by his lugubrious dignity, addressed some cheerful observation to him, in passing.

"Aint you got no manners?" exclaimed Sambo, in great ire. "Don't you see *I'se a funeral?*"

Neale's respect for Dr. Stanton equalled his love for his many estimable qualities, and he pitied him for the reluctant part he was obliged to play in this scene, as yet unaccountable to his apprehension. Cousin Clarice had no symptoms of the horse-fancier about her, so, although their road conducted them past the stables, it was not likely that they were bound upon a visit to Frisk and his comrades. He watched them until they were beyond the barn and stable-doors, and saw them turn into a by-path, leaving the orchard at their backs.

"Where can they be going?"

He would not have known that he had spoken aloud, but for the prompt answer to his query.

"To the family burying-ground!"

Miriam stood near him, also looking after the pedestrians, mortification and contempt, sorrow or anger depicted in her countenance.

"Oh!" said Thorne, sobering instantly. "Your cousin has near relatives interred there, I suppose?"

"None nearer of kin than my mother's brothers, who were, of course, her first cousins. She was engaged to be married to my Uncle George, at the time of his death. Twice a year she pays this visit to his grave."

She tried conscientiously to make this explanation, without prejudice or comment, but Neale easily perceived the truth of her impatient scorn of this parade of sorrow, this childish mummery of a mournful pilgrimage. To him, the whole scene was ludicrous in the extreme, in spite of Dr. Stanton's participation in it, and if he restrained his mirth, it was only out of regard for Miriam's feelings. This deliberate and periodical investiture of herself in mourning array on the part of the bereaved bride; the ostentatious show of undying affection for her lost lover; the formal promenade on the father's arm, along a dusty road, under the summer sun, to the tomb, that she might there pour out the measure of tears accumulated in the last half-year, was too offensive to Thorne's nice taste and unobtrusive memories of his own dead, to excite in him one atom of sympathy.

He walked up and down the porch with Miriam, while she talked.

"That was fifteen years ago. She is now forty—so mamma says—although she appears much younger. Grandpapa and Mamma feel very kindly toward her for the sake of my poor uncle, and she professes unbounded attachment for them. She lives with her married sister nine months of the year, the other three are spent with us. But for me, I think that Mamma would persuade Grandpapa to invite her to make this house her home. It is the only subject upon which we have ever disagreed."

She trod more proudly; her hands were clenched, and hot tears swelled her drooping eye-lids.

"You cannot help finding it out, Mr. Thorne, and I may as well be candid first as last, upon this subject. I do not like my Cousin Clarice. I have never liked her since she used to wheedle me into telling her all my juvenile delinquencies, and then betrayed them secretly to Mamma, that I 'might not grow up to be a sorrow to my friends.' I would have confessed every thing to my mother, myself, but for her meddling. Her appearance here, spring and fall, is the signal for my troubles to begin. She has a mania for confidences, and knows the private history of everybody. She torments me ceaselessly by spying out my actions, and criticising them; not often to me, but, insinuatingly, to Mamma, who begs me 'to try and be very circumspect while Cousin Clarice is here—she is *so* fastidious!' I am willing to submit to the rule of those whom I love and honor, and my rightful guardians never complain of me, except on her account. I cannot cope with her, for I am straightforward, to bluntness, and she never takes the plain, direct road, if there is a crooked one to be found. I get angry, sinfully angry with her, and let her know it; and she never loses her temper—pities, and forgives me. The more I resent her surveillance and interference, the more lamb-like she is—the more resolute to befriend me, whether I am ungrateful or not."

They were standing in the shady end of the piazza. Her fingers beat a hurried tattoo upon the upper rail of the balustrade; the drop of dew was dried upon her lashes.

"I dare say all this sounds like senseless vehemence, babyish petulance, to you, but I have no one else to whom I can speak what I am now feeling, and causeless reproach from those I love is very hard to bear."

"Believe me, when I say that I should never think of imputing ill-nature or unwarrantable irritation to you. I am sure that you have had abundant provocation for what you

have said. If you will pardon similar frankness in me, I will add, that what I have seen of Miss Stanton tallies exactly with your description of her. Nor do I acknowledge your right to be reserved with me only when you are in trouble. You sympathized with and consoled me, in my 'terrible disaster'—remember!"

Miriam smiled, but the tears rushed up again with the effort.

"It was indiscreet, unkind, and unladylike in me, to forestall your judgment of my mother's guest. You can bear me witness, that, impulsive as I am, I have never spoken in like terms of any one else to you. I was very angry when I came out here. I expected that the piazza was deserted, for I thought you had gone, and I meant to walk off my fit of passion before I saw Mamma again, or Grandpapa returned. It is a ceaseless warfare, Mr. Thorne—the struggle to subdue a temper like mine! I pray twice as often and earnestly, for strength to rise above my evil passions, when Cousin Clarice is here, and yet I am perpetually transgressing. My resolutions are like threads in the flame."

"The fault is not all yours," rejoined Neale, soothingly. "Do you object to telling me upon what grounds this affectionate censor has founded her latest complaint against you? Did I not understand you to intimate that some such had been transmitted through your mother?"

Her burning blush convinced him that he had not judged erroneously in imagining that he was, in some way, connected with the reproof.

"I ought not to repeat all that was said," replied Miriam, unconsciously putting up her hand to the scarlet cheek that was next to him. "The purport of her communication made to Mamma, while she was dressing for her walk, was that I did not appear glad to see her, that my manner was more abrupt than it used to be, and *distrait*, when it should

be attentive; that I caught up her words quickly, and interpreted them wrongfully. Altogether, there was a manifest change in me, and not for the better. It was not so much the matter of the accusation, as the fact of its being entered at all, that fretted me."

"It is no concern of hers, that I can see, what your behavior is!" said Thorne, in honest displeasure. "A fitting theme to be discussed over her elaborate mourning toilet! This but confirms me in my doctrine, that a systematic hypocrite is capable of almost any degree of meanness and sin. It is impossible for your mother to credit her representations, opposed, as they are, by the evidence of her own senses and judgment."

"She does not actually believe what is said—only that Cousin Clarice is sincere, and really fancies she sees the faults in me, which she laments. 'Laments!' that is the word. She has been 'fearing' and 'lamenting' and 'suggesting' over 'our dear Miriam,' ever since I was four years old. Mamma entreats me to adapt myself to her standard, whenever I can. 'Clarice has her peculiarities,' she said, just now—'but we must remember her early disappointment, her devotion to George's memory and to us, through all these years, and do what we can for her happiness. She speaks of you with the utmost affection, and would be sadly grieved, were she to suspect that I have repeated what she said about you. I believe that she has your good at heart; and, after all, there may be truth in her representations of the danger of my not curbing you when it is needful—you being an only child, and very little controlled.'"

Two great drops escaped the desperate hold of the long lashes, and rolled down her cheeks. She dashed them off.

"I *am* unused to control! Doubtless, I am indulged more than is good for me, or for those around me. If Grandpapa or Mamma—if *you* were to tell me this, and

twenty other truths, more pungent and humiliating, I might writhe at the pain, but I would still say, gratefully—'Faithful are the wounds of a friend!' It is different when malice borrows the hand of the friend with which to deal the blow. I told Mamma that I could not endure she should blame herself for the non-fulfilment of duties, to which she has given the greater part of her life; that my faults were, none of them, of her making; but she was troubled and despondent. It seems that Cousin Clarice infused an additional drop of venom by a reference to my lost brother. He was, as you may have heard, very wild in his early manhood, and Mamma reproaches herself for not bringing him up rightly."

"A delicate and cousinly act in Miss Stanton!" interjected Thorne.

"It added heat to my anger, I confess. But what am I doing? Mr. Thorne! do you hear your tower-bell striking nine? How often, to-day, will my peevish story be blamed for the hot ride and unfinished manuscript?"

"Not once. Set your mind at rest on that score! I shall stay where I am, until you are happier. The memory of that woeful countenance will retard the completion of the manuscript more grievously than the loss of the hour I have spent here since breakfast. What say you to an alliance—strictly defensive—against this mischief-maker; the main article in which compact shall be, indifference and disbelief, sublime and total, to every thing ill-natured she hints or asserts? I think it will be a successful, and often a diverting game."

He waited to have her give him her hand, in token of agreement, and to see her own arch smile break through the clouds, then mounted the horse which stood at the gate, and rode off.

He dined out that day, by invitation, and evening was

drawing on, when he stopped at Mr. Fry's, on his way home. The object of his call was to hand Mrs. Fry a note from his sister that had come enclosed in a letter to himself. These missives contained the gratifying intelligence that she would be with her brother and friend, in a week—to wit: upon the following Tuesday. Neale was delighted, and Mrs. Fry overjoyed.

With characteristic haste and incoherence, she plied him with questions as to Gertrude's habits and tastes, that she might consult each and all of them, in the preparation of her apartment and the edibles for her consumption. The brother had to plead profound ignorance upon these essential points. He was unable to say whether his sister would prefer the blue or green chamber; agreeing one moment, with her hostess—that-hoped-to-be—in the opinion that blue suited her complexion best, and coinciding, the next, with her affirmation that there was nothing so pleasant to the eyes in summer as pale-green. He was equally uncertain as to Gertrude's fondness for sweets and pickles. He knew, he said, that she ate these, with avidity, when they were children together, but, latterly, they had had so much else to talk about, when he was at home, that these minor likings and distastes had been overlooked.

"Just like a man!" complained Mrs. Fry. "I'll wager my best silk dress that she can give me a perfect list of these 'minor likings' of *yours*—ungrateful creature that you are! I suppose it never occurred to you—profound logician, as they call you—how it happened that your favorite dishes were not missing from the table, for a single meal, while your vacation lasted; or, if it did strike you as a proper attention, you gave the servants all the credit of consulting your petty weaknesses as to sauces and puddings. You are all alike—the best of you—my husband not excepted! You understand as much about women, their feelings, their ways

and their sacrifices, as I do about Greek. I can say Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, and then I skip to Omega. That is your fashion of mastering our characters. The only difference is, that I confess myself to be an ignoramus, while you are puffed up by the conceit that you are made proficients in the language of womanhood, by having learned five letters of the alphabet. I have not one grain of patience with you!"

"If you had—if the only teachers, competent to give instruction in the recondite lore of which you speak, were patient and sincere, instead of capricious and uncandid, we might be learned, in time, despite our stupidity," rejoined Thorne, who always enjoyed a tilt with his quick-tongued hostess. "What can we do but believe the little you condescend to tell us of yourselves, and then, reasoning from analogy, and the application of the principles thus gained, establish some plausible theory as to what you concede?"

"And a fine botch you make of it! A delightful hodge-podge! Then, I shall get both rooms ready for Gertrude, and let her take her choice. Does she like peaches?"

"Yes," said Neale positively.

"And grapes?"

"I am sure of it! That is to say, I take it for granted that she does. I know that her brother does."

"There it is! Isn't that *too* much like a man? 'Orthodoxy is my doxy, heterodoxy is yours.' Nobody but a man—a great, selfish, lumbering, masculine, human being, would ever have written that mighty smart saying, and you all practise it. When you get a wife, you will expect her to be a smoker, because you love cigars."

"Not I! I have no fancy for becoming the keeper of a Lady Gay Spanker."

"Nor a Di. Vernon?" asked Mrs. Fry, with a piercing gaze of her bright black eyes.

"Di. Vernon was too good for that characterless Frank Osbaldistone." Thorne evaded the meaning of her query and glance. "If I must take one of the two, give me Rebecca, and not Rowena—Flora M'Ivor, rather than pretty, tame, little Rose Bradwardine."

"Which reminds me," pursued Mrs. Fry, regardless, as usual, of hiding the trail she left in passing from one topic to another, "I looked for a visit from Miriam, to-day. Hugh met her yesterday, and told her that he had a new book to lend her, whereupon she promised to run down early this morning, or late this afternoon, if she could spare the time, and get it."

"You had better let me be the bearer of the volume. You must recollect that she is engaged with company."

"Ah! who is there?"

"Her cousin—Miss Stanton."

"Distress!" Mrs. Fry dropped upon a seat, clasped her hands, and rolled up her eyes. "Poor Miriam! poor Mrs. Hartley! poor Dr. Stanton! poor everybody that can be affected by her machinations!"

"You make us out to be a poverty-stricken household!" replied Thorne, amused by the energy of her exclamations.

"Not you! you are but a passenger, and, moreover, a minister—and she adores the clergy—corresponds with six or eight all the time, and has set her cap at a couple of dozen. She has been engaged to two, within the last ten years, but through some miracle of mercy they escaped her toils."

"You must be mistaken. She still mourns the loss of her early betrothed—George Stanton."

Mrs. Fry fell back in a fit of what threatened to be inextinguishable laughter.

"Oh, dear!" she gasped, mirthful tears gemming her rosy

cheeks. "You have heard that moving story already, have you? If you will promise not to divulge it, I will tell you something I have never imparted to a living creature, except Hugh. Have I your word?"

"I will keep your secret, certainly, until I have your permission to make it known," said Thorne; his curiosity raised by her merriment. Then, too, he reflected that he might gather here some material for strengthening and maintaining the league formed that morning.

"Not that I would care a straw about it on my own account, were the tale proclaimed from the house-tops; but that dear woman, Mrs. Hartley, and the good Doctor have believed in Cousin Clarice so long, that it would be a pity to expose her as a humbug. Yet a humbug she is, and an unmitigated one, as I can prove. I am thirty-one years old. It is very gallant in you to feign surprise so well. Most gentlemen attempt a like performance, when I tell them my age. I was married at twenty-five; but, although my father would barbarously send me to school until I was nineteen, I had my full stature—dwarfish as it may appear to you six-footers—by the time I was fifteen, and the notions and airs of a grown-up belle, with beaux enough to carry out the delusion. George Stanton was twenty-two when I was sixteen, he being three years younger than Cousin Clarice. She was courting him, and he—turn your eyes away, for I am expected to blush just here—was courting *me!* One week before the poor fellow died, he wrote me a love-letter—a proposal, in due form. I have it upstairs now—a very proper, gentlemanly, but rather too sentimental epistle. I am sorry that I answered it immediately, for a rejection is generally rather trying to a man's self-love, and George was an amiable fellow, and a great friend of mine, although not over brilliant in intellect. Etiquette, as laid down in the 'Young Lady's Friend,' and

other odious hand-books treating of these matters, required me to return his letter with my reply, but I was ignorant of this rule, at that time. So I sent my note of discard, and I have always hoped that it was not to escape the uncomfortable sensations excited by it, that he went off to hunt wild pigeons next day, got caught in a violent rain-storm that wet him to the skin and brought on the pleurisy, which ended his life in four days.

"I went to the funeral with a terribly sore heart, and nearly cried my eyes out during the sermon. Not that I took to myself any of the blame of his death. I never was verdant enough to think, with some vain women, that a lady's 'No' is a bullet to the heart that adores her. Nor did I care more for him than for twenty others, but it was sad to think that my last communication with him had given him pain. Judge, then, of my amazement, when I saw Cousin Clarice rush forward, as the coffin was about to be removed, throw her arms about it, and faint, after the most approved style described in the Laura Matilda novels!

"The story was trumpeted abroad on the wings of the wind. 'She had been affianced to her cousin for months, but they had lacked courage to own it, for fear their parents might object to the marriage of such near relatives.' Dr. Stanton, it was said, had very strict scruples upon this head. She had nursed him tenderly during his illness, but, owing to his delirium, he had not appeared to recognize her until just before his death, when he was too weak to speak. He died with one hand locked in hers, the other in his sister's. Poor George! his was an honest soul, and he was a true Christian. I hope he was never permitted to know that Hypocrisy watched, with crocodile tears, on one side of his dying couch, while the sister's heart wept blood upon the other! Cousin Clarice wore black for several years, and still robes herself in sable when she visits his grave."

"Detestable! But what motive could have impelled her to this vast outlay of pains and falsehood?"

"That question is another illustration of what I was preaching just now—the ignorance of men—"

"And the sinuosities of women?" interposed Thorne, interrogatively.

"Exactly, my good sir! Clarice Stanton is a character! If you are not easily nauseated by deceit, you will find the study of her behavior curious and interesting. She has a passion for creating a sensation; a morbid love for sentimental stories. She is inherently selfish, yet covetous of popularity, and has had, all her life, an inveterate itching in her fingers, that is only satisfied by sticking them eternally into other people's pies. Sum up these, and you will begin to see why, to her, an orphan, with a narrow income, this figment of an early disappointment, that has won for her a life-long interest in Dr. Stanton's affections and—estate! that has given her the prestige of a romantic history in society, attracting notice and sympathy and respect to such constancy and beautiful resignation, and opened up to her greedy ear, the secrets of many other love-lorn hearts—that this manœuvre, whose pivot was poor George's death-bed, has proved a clever speculation."

"But the subsequent engagements?"

"Are disbelieved by Dr. Stanton and his daughter. If she had secured a real live husband, she was prepared to bid adieu to the memory of the *soi disant* betrothed. I won't quote the maxim about the dead lion, for I can see that you do not need to have it recalled to your memory. Since both of these conquests—made at a distance you understand—proved to be flashes in the pan, she remains true to the old love, the old homestead, and the bombazine cloak! Oh!" added the little woman, in earnestness so genuine as not to be misunderstood—"how I despise that woman!

And I tell you what will happen one of these days, unless Providence and Hugh interfere to prevent the catastrophe. If she does not stop this everlasting, hypocritical sighing over Miriam's 'eccentricities,' I will give her my opinion of herself in as plain English as I can put it."

"Good!" Thorne had nearly said. He checked himself in time, and substituted an inquiry. "You do not mean that she carries tales of her uncle's household to others?"

"I do not! Did any body ever catch Clarice Stanton—this mealy-mouthed, seraphic Cousin Clarice, who 'lives but for the happiness of others'—her admirers will tell you—this pattern of saintly etiquette—did any one ever accuse her, in thought, of being a tale-bearer—a back-biter? Oh, fie! I think I see her roll up the whites of her eyes, and call for sal-volatile for herself, and chloride of lime to purify my imagination, at the idea of the aspersion. But I can tell you what she does, and that continually. She hates Miriam, as only natures so antagonistic as theirs, can hate one another. She has twisted gentle Mrs. Hartley around her mimmenie-pimmenie forefinger, ever since the dear lady lost her youngest brother, for she was like a mother to George. Dr. Stanton is not so docile, so she is cautious in handling him; and I suppose Miriam is too proud to enter a complaint to her Grandfather of the insults she receives. I know she has never uttered a syllable to me derogatory to her cousin, but I have eyes of my own and ears—"

"And tongue!" Thorne longed, in his love of mischief, to add, but refrained, lest he should lose the rest of the story.

"And I can see how she is worried out of her senses by Clarice's incessant scrutiny and innuendoes. If Miriam walks across the room, instead of mincing and tripping, as *she* does, Cousin Clarice glances around warily, as if to assure herself that no one else has noticed the unladylike movement, and murmurs to the dear friend nearest her—

'Our poor, dear Miriam's motions are *so* abrupt! but it is only her way. She has no sisters, and my cousin Edith, although a lovely woman, has very little idea of family government. After all, Miriam has noble, excellent traits. The pity is that she never does herself justice.' So, if Miriam laughs, becomes animated in conversation, or says an original thing in her original way—there is the nervous little start of offended susceptibilities, the soft expostulation—'My dear!' or, worst of all, a quick pretence of attempting to cover the breach of propriety or the lapsus linguæ, by some starched flummery of her own manufacture. If I had such a tormenter, I should engage her in a pitched battle, and talk her out of her intrenchments of pretty, sanctimonious affectations, if I could—if not, I would shock her to death by a charge of solid, downright truth, and rid myself and the earth of her."

"Why does she dislike Miss Miriam?"

"Haven't I told you that they were as unlike as the positive and negative poles of an electric battery? And, once in a while, Miriam is provoked into getting off some pertinent thing that turns Cousin Clarice's twaddle into ridicule; and, like all other snaky, cold-blooded women, she never forgets an injury, real or supposed. I recollect one of these hits that Miriam paid for, through whole months afterward. Cousin Clarice is, as I have said, the recipient of all the tender confidences that are astir among her friends. I defy any one who has a secret to save it from her clutches, if she sets her busy brain to work to get hold of it. Well, I was at the Doctor's one afternoon, and she was buzzing on in her sentimental cant, with tiresome stories of this and that cross or balk in the love-experiences of various persons, and the counsel she had administered in each case. If one might believe her, there was not a household to which she was ever admitted, whose skeleton-closet had not been unbarred

to her sympathetic touch. Husbands had lodged complaints of wives, and *vice versa;* brothers and sisters asked her mediation in their quarrels;—but to unhappy lovers, whatever were the phases and grades of their misery, she was a sovereign panacea. Miriam doesn't talk this trash herself, as you must have noticed, and she got very tired of it at length.

"'Cousin Clarice,' said she, in that quiet, grave tone of hers, that never prepares one for any thing saucy, "you ought to write D. D. after your name."

"'Why so, my dear?' Cousin Clarice asked, benignly. 'It is an ecclesiastical honor, and never bestowed upon women.' As if Miriam were a child in leading-strings, and not yet into her primer!

"'Why,' answered Miriam, 'if an LL. D. is one versed in the laws, and an M. D. one thoroughly acquainted with medicine and its uses, such an extensive knowledge of Love's misfortunes and their cure should entitle you to the degree of Doctor of Disappointments!'

"Miriam was not over sixteen then, but I don't believe Cousin Clarice has forgotten it to this day. What made it worse for the object of her spite was, that Max Wilde was after that continually finding occasions for writing notes to her, directed to 'Miss Clarice Stanton, D. D.'"

The comic vituperations of his plain-spoken little friend so fully sustained Miriam's half-tearful complaint of her cousin, that Thorne admitted them to belief, with fewer expurgations than he was wont to make in Mrs. Fry's extravaganzas of speech. She might and did exaggerate in the details of her spicy narratives, but her facts were substantial and true, and in this instance these amply justified her low opinion of Cousin Clarice's deserts. Thorne revolved within himself how he should meet her, how conduct himself in her company, with this unflattering exhibit of her hollowness and

falsehood fresh in his thoughts. So imbued was he with a sense of her unworthiness, that he almost expected to see her shrink and vanish under the eye of an honest man; imagined that the spurious metal would, at his approach, give forth so base a sound as to expose its true character to all who heard.

Not a bit of it! Cousin Clarice, dressed with extreme nicety and simple elegance, sat in the usual summer-evening parlor of the family—the piazza—hemming a strip of lawn ruffling, an inch wide, looking very cool and very prim. So far from shrivelling into nothingness, or sinking through the floor, or performing any like uncomfortable action, she welcomed Mr. Thorne home with marked graciousness. The varnish of her exterior was of a patent that never cracked or grew gummy.

"We were just speaking of you," she said, smiling affably. "Cousin Miriam informs me that it is no unfrequent occurrence for you to absent yourself throughout the entire day. Your duties must be exceedingly arduous, and you should be watchful that they do not injure your health; or, rather, your people should make this *their* care."

Thorne answered politely, but with no waste of words, and passed on to the bench where Miriam was sitting, with Willie at her side. She looked up at his approach, timidly serious. It was plain that she repented the heat and frankness of the morning, and was now on her best behavior, in the hope of atoning for her indiscretion. Neale gave her a smile—friendly, encouraging, not to say tender—and picked up Willie, thereby earning a right to that young man's vacated seat.

"And what have you been doing in the way of work or play to-day, Willie?"

In accordance with his expectations, the child commenced a circumstantial description of all that had transpired in his

limited sphere since the morning. Mr. Thorne did not know Cousin Clarice, if he hoped to seal her lips by this stratagem. Her thin voice "clipped" in at the first full stop:

"Cousin Miriam—excuse me for interrupting you, Willie dear, but I wish to speak to your aunt—Miriam, my love, I hope you will not think me officious, but Mr. Thorne looks weary, and still far from strong. Would it not be well to offer him a glass of wine or bitters before supper?"

Thorne's reply superseded the necessity of Miriam's:

"I am obliged to you, Miss Stanton, but I am quite well, and not at all fatigued. If I felt the need of a tonic, I am enough at home here, not to wait for an invitation to take one."

"Ah!" Cousin Clarice was too well bred to do more than look her sense of the cool assurance of this reply—a look that would have cut Thorne to the quick, had she been one in authority in the household. As he considered her right to be there, and to give orders, inferior to his own, he smiled at her dignified stare, and addressed himself again to Willie.

Another sentence from the boy, and Cousin Clarice's spool dropped from her lap, rolled across the floor, and—farther than she intended—down the steps, hop, skip, and jump, into the yard.

"Willie! Willie! run for cousin's spool, won't you?"

The obliging little fellow slipped hastily from Thorne's knee, and set out in search of the lost property. It was a tiny reel of very fine cotton, and diligently as the blue eyes explored every tuft of grass and behind every pebble, it was not until Neale joined in the hunt that it was discovered. Then—alas for the purity of the gossamer thread, and the muslin to be sewed with it!—a small foot had trodden upon it unawares, and pressed it into the black mould. Thorne brushed off the loose earth, and presented it to the

owner, with his best bow. The white fingers took hold of it very gingerly.

"Why, Willie! cousin would have gone to pick it up herself, if she had not believed that you were the most careful boy in the world. See, my dear! it is all spoiled, and I have no more like it."

Willie was acutely sensitive to censure, and required it so rarely, that he was terrified at any approach to fault-finding. He trudged up the steps which he had descended so blithely, hanging his head, his lip trembling with mortification and wounded feeling, and was making straight for Miriam, when Cousin Clarice intercepted him.

"Only see!" she repeated, with a slight affectation of sorrow, assumed to hide her annoyance at a mishap, that would have occasioned nothing but amusement to Miriam, had hers been the damaged article. But Miss Stanton's was not a soul above trifles. "Cousin will be obliged to throw all this nice cotton away, because Willie was so careless. I am *very* sorry!"

"I didn't mean to—" the child tried to say, but his swelling heart burst in a gush of tears.

"How *can* you?" exclaimed Miriam, angrily, to her cousin, catching up her nurseling in her arms. "There! my treasure! Milly's best blessing! Willie darling! We know that you couldn't help it, and there's no harm done after all. I would give Cousin Clarice a hundred spools rather than have you shed a single one of these big tears. Nobody shall scold my boy for an accident!"

She hushed him upon her breast, as though he were a helpless infant, and Cousin Clarice sat, placid and upright, the embodiment of innocence, serene under injustice.

"Pray do not lead him to imagine that the spool is of any value in my sight, my dear cousin! I grieve that I have offended him and you. My object was merely to in-

culcate, gently and affectionately as I could, a lesson of carefulness, even in small matters."

Miriam vouchsafed no reply. Rising, still holding the child by the hand, she led him off in the direction of her room, to efface the tear stains. Cousin Clarice shook her head and sighed plaintively. .

"Willie used to be a sweet babe," she said, pensively, "but I fear he is sadly spoiled. I did not dream that he would so resent my playful remark. But cousin Miriam is too youthful and altogether too inexperienced, to be intrusted with the entire care of a child, and that child a boy, who inherits so many of his father's unhappy traits."

"You mistake him, Miss Stanton, if you ascribe his tears to anger, or, as you say, resentment," answered Thorne. "He is the best—the loveliest child I ever saw, and under perfect control. His constitution is fragile, and his nervous system proportionately delicate. You cannot wonder that he shrinks and trembles at what he feels to be unmerited reproof."

And, lifting his hat, he left her to digest this unexpected reply. He had done his duty as civilly as he could, had defended his ally and her pet boy. He had done something else, whereof he was unconscious then—the knowledge of which would not have spoiled his night's rest, had the truth been revealed to him. He had made Cousin Clarice his enemy.

CHAPTER XIII.

DR. BOGUS.

"We are happy to announce to our readers that the Rev. Dr. Bogus, of L——, will preach in the Grand Street Church (Rev. Mr. Thorne's), to-morrow morning. Many of our citizens will gladly embrace this opportunity of again hearing the distinguished divine, whose former visits to our place are gratefully remembered by those who have had the privilege of attending upon his ministrations. As a gentleman, a scholar, and an orator, the Rev. Doctor merits the distinction everywhere awarded to him. We understand that he is, at present, the guest of our worthy Mayor."

Thus ran the sounding puff that appeared in Saturday's issue of the "Limestone Gazette." Similar notices trumpeted the "Rev. Doctor's" visits to every place that boasted a newspaper. Of course, he had nothing to do with their insertion, but while abler and better men than he came and went from these towns without proclamation, he was one whom editors and reporters delighted to honor.

"Blessed," says the holy text, "are ye that sow beside all waters." Dr. Bogus had the knack of casting his seed where the ripening would be of most advantage to himself. His was the rare gift of achieving success, so aptly expressed by the vulgar proverb, which teaches that some people are born with silver spoons in their mouths. Dr. Bogus' invaluable spoon was a combination of consummate address with unblushing audacity, fused together with much real

talent, popular rather than sterling. By means of this convenient implement, he had never failed to stir himself, like a brilliant bubble, to the top of whatever chaldron circumstances threw him into, whether it were collegiate institutions, or the wider world, of which the halls of learning were a useful type to so shrewd a pupil. There were more profound scholars in his class, men who had toiled through the midnights he spent in conviviality with the few kindred spirits among his mates, or at the merry-makings of the neighboring gentry, where he was always in request. But these were mostly tallow-faced, bashful youths, who stuttered in answering the easiest question on the awful examination day, while young Bogus' assured bearing and ready replies did wonders toward convincing the sapient inquisitors that he was the fittest representative of the venerable Alma Mater upon commencement-day. So, likewise, when his theological course was completed, and his fellow licentiates were glad to be called to obscure country parishes, where they might begin at the foot of the professional ladder, he contrived, and by no apparent effort of his own, to secure the pastorate of a prominent city church. Here he played the Don, at his imperious will, as the "crack" preacher and the darling of fashionable circles, religious and secular. Crafty as a spider, he threw out lines in every direction where he scented a probable opportunity of advancing his interests—and the use he made of these wires, in the fulness of time, evidenced a sagacity hardly less than superhuman.

He made one mistake in early life, but since it was the only instance in his whole career of his betrayal by his heart into any indiscretion, however trivial, it was a pardonable blunder. While in college, he contracted an engagement with a moderately pretty girl, who afterward developed into a dowdy and a fool. There are strong reasons for believing that he perceived his folly, and bitterly repented

the entanglement before the betrothment was fulfilled. Had the bride been a nameless plebeian, we do his sense of propriety and self-respect only justice in saying that the marriage would never have taken place. But she belonged to a wealthy and influential family, and his footing in the world was too new and insecure to allow him to brave their resentment. He made the best of a bad bargain; married her with a good grace, and condescended to use her relatives as stepping-stones to his greatness. Upon the whole, it was not so serious a disadvantage as it appeared at first sight—this wedding a cipher, and an uncomely cipher at that. Mrs. Bogus—fascinating, beautiful, intellectual, would have been a handsome ornament to his establishment, but it was not in the power of mortal woman, however perfect, to reflect lustre upon him. Her best efforts would be mere moonshine—tolerable when the sun was out of sight, and fading into pallid nothingness at his rising. Were his partner the attractive being described above, he might, he probably would, be tempted to loiter in her society—for he was no stranger to his own weakness in this respect—and thus damage irremediably such of his prospects, and they were not few or slight, as were based upon his popularity with other fair ones. In the existing state of affairs, he was drawn from his line of progress by no dangerous temptations within his home. He was the idol of matrons and youthful wives, who loved society and admiration; the pet of unmarried belles, and the oracle of husbands and fathers; while the young men thought it a jolly thing to have so dashing, yet so harmless a rival. Had he been a bachelor, they would have hated him for the gay, debonair air with which he sued for the company and favor of their beauties, and the success that crowned his attentions to the capricious creatures, whose variations of taste and mood drove other admirers nearly frantic. But they remembered, and he

knew that they did, the dumpy, ill-dressed woman that waddled up the aisle every Sunday to the pastor's pew, with six little Boguses trotting after her, like a brood of ducklings, and remembering, laughed, and let him have his swing.

"Poor fellow! He appreciates a fine woman, and it would be a pity to spoil what little comfort he can take in their society."

The Mayor was elate at the honor conferred upon his mansion by the sojourn of so distinguished a guest within its walls. Dr. Bogus had been sent for, a hundred miles, to perform the marriage ceremony of the Hon. Daniel Bridgford's daughter. She had spent two winters in the city blessed in being the scene of the Rev. Doctor's labors, and while there had, in virtue of her father's position and wealth, and her own personal attractions, enjoyed the distinction of a place upon the clerical list of first-class belles. She doted upon him as a "love of a man," and to please her, the Mayor's son, besides paying his travelling expenses, had elegantly testified his sense of the inconvenience to which the lady-killer had subjected himself to gratify his Arabella, by representing every mile by a gold dollar in the wedding fee. The officiating minister spent the week of festivity with the bridal party, in the Congressman's palatial halls, to his own lively satisfaction, and the delight of the other guests. Letitia Lewis went crazy about him, and he flirted with her, in a style that would have been cried out upon as scandalous in any other married man, but was innocence personified when the gay Benedick was a clergyman, and the clergyman Dr. Bogus. These pleasing associations lent reason to the Mayor's earnest plea that the Doctor should be his guest when he visited Limestone. Mrs. Bogus had property in that vicinity, and her liege lord made it convenient, now and then, when he came to look after the rents, to pass the Sabbath in the pretty town.

Sabbath morning, and a crowded house; benches in the aisles; people standing in the galleries, blocking up the vestibule, the pulpit stairs, every place where they could gain a foothold. The peal of the organ heralded the appearance of the orator of the day. Miriam declared to Mrs. Fry that she came near, in her excitement or confusion, playing "See the Conquering Hero comes!" so like a Fourth of July gathering was the bustling, expectant throng. The ministers entered from the door at the left of the pulpit, and seated themselves side by side, in full view of the congregation. One face—pale, clear, calm with the beaming of the solemn inward light, the hair, with its brown shadows and golden reflections, resting like a halo upon the brow—all knew and most loved; but the other was scanned with more curiosity. Olive complexion, black hair and whiskers were thrown into bold contrast by a white cravat of a foppishly clerical tie; chiselled features, more *distingué* than handsome; a dark eye, well opened, but not bright or quick; a tall, graceful form, clad in fashionable habiliments—these made up the exterior of the great man, who sat at his ease, and looked over the assembly with the aspect of one to whom such scenes were no novelty. He left the preliminary exercises for the pastor, albeit there was no conceivable reason, besides indolence or a desire for effect, why he should not have performed them himself.

They were over—invocation, reading, prayer, and song of praise, and the slender waist and shapely shoulders and head of the famous stranger gradually grew into view above the desk. His first act was to button his coat tightly; then he drew from his pocket a folded handkerchief, shook it out with a subdued flourish, and tucked it under one side of the Bible; arranged his manuscript within its leaves; lastly, he indulged himself and the spectators in a slow survey of the house from wall to wall, and from pulpit

to choir. Considering, apparently, that they were not altogether unworthy of sitting at his feet, and that their appetites were whetted to the desired edge, he opened his mouth and spake. The grand sequel of these formidable preparations was described in Monday's "Gazette" as "an able and profound discourse, abounding in melting pathos, strains of fervid, soul-lifting eloquence, and varied by an occasional happy display of that caustic and stinging satire, which no one better understands how to employ, with telling effect, than does this truly eminent divine." To sum up the story in an unreportorial abstract, the sensation preacher had been delivered of another sensation sermon.

Of the Stanton household, Cousin Clarice was most enthusiastic in her laudations of orator and oration. Dr. Bogus was an old acquaintance of hers, and she kept the carriage waiting after church, while she sought and obtained an interview with the lion. Her happiness was not restricted to the bliss of a candied (please mark the *e f*) exclamation of delighted recognition, and a prolonged pressure of the hand. (Dr. Bogus was perfect in the practice of Cupid's light artillery.) The crowd around him having cleared away in a great measure, he walked out of church with her, down the steps, and quite to the carriage, wherein Mrs. Hartley and Miriam were already seated. It was an edifying spectacle to the ambitious Brummells of the town, to note the ease and grace with which the model divine paid his devoirs to mother and daughter, and his manner of handing Cousin Clarice into the vehicle. The very lifting of his hat, as he bowed himself away, was a study in itself.

"Edith, my love, at Clarice's suggestion, I have invited Dr. Bogus to take tea with us to-morrow night," said Dr. Stanton, on the road. "I trust that it will be no inconvenience to you?"

"None, whatever," returned Mrs. Hartley, hospitably.

"Cousin is too good a housekeeper to be disturbed by being called upon to entertain company, at any season," said Cousin Clarice, honiedly. "I should not have ventured to offer my modest suggestion, had I not been sure of that point. I consider it an inestimable privilege to be permitted to enjoy Dr. Bogus's society, even for a single evening; but I thought less of the pleasure to myself, in reminding Uncle to invite him, than of what was due from Mr. Thorne to one who has laid him under obligations, and who is, moreover, entitled to every attention he can offer."

"What *are* you talking about?" asked Miriam, abruptly.

Cousin Clarice shivered, as at the scraping of a pin upon glass, or the crushing of a bit of charcoal between her teeth.

"My dear! how you startle me! I meant to say, that Dr. Bogus had done Mr. Thorne and Mr. Thorne's congregation a great favor by preaching in his church to-day, and that our young friend cannot but reverence his senior in the ministry, and esteem himself honored by association with so eminent a man. And it seemed to me but right that Uncle, as Mr. Thorne's host, should acknowledge this sense of obligation by showing him whatever politeness he could. Etiquette demands it, my love!"

"Neither Mr. Thorne nor his people asked Dr. Bogus to come to Limestone. They are satisfied with their pastor; he is able, and not more competent than willing, to preach to them. I cannot see, therefore, that your Apollo has bestowed any such high and mighty favor upon us as you assert. If anybody should be grateful, it is Dr. Bogus, for the opportunity of exhibiting himself upon a new stage. He evidently enjoyed it!" retorted Miriam, hotly and hurriedly.

Cousin Clarice shivered again—it was her favorite mode of expressing her exquisite sensitiveness to sharp or rough speech—and looked piteously at her uncle.

"Miriam, my daughter, there is no need of getting excited in the matter," interposed the Doctor, but smiling, not displeasedly. "Her cause is a right one, Clarice, although she may seem to be over-warm in its defence. We have no objection to extend the hospitalities of our church and our houses to Dr. Bogus, or any other respectable minister, who happens to visit our town. But while we have a faithful and able pastor of our own—one who is alike admired and beloved by us all—we respect him and ourselves too truly to feel *honored* by their chance ministrations, 'eminent' and titled though they may be."

Cousin Clarice held her tongue, in respect or fear, but she compensated herself for the seeming defeat by "doing" the martyr for the rest of the day.

The guests on Monday evening were all gentlemen—including the Mayor and the pastors of the five churches, that, with the one in Grand street, composed the ecclesiastical bulwarks of Limestone. After an hour passed in the parlor, with the ladies, they were summoned to Mrs. Hartley's sumptuous repast, and, when ample justice had been done to that, repaired, by Dr. Stanton's request, to the *al-fresco* smoking-room—the spacious piazza. Miriam put Willie to bed; waited to see him asleep, and returned to the drawing-room. To her surprise, she found the lamp screwed down to the lowest point of flame, and from the darkness issued a warning "Sh-sh-sh!" such as only Cousin Clarice could sibillate. As her eyes became more used to the gloom, Miriam discerned the dim outlines of two forms sitting at the window, the shutters of which were bowed, and her mother's hand drew her gently to her side.

"We are enjoying the gentlemen's conversation, my dear. It is pleasant to hear them talk with one another. They converse more sensibly, and with less restraint, than when they are with us," she whispered.

To tell the truth, Miriam cared not one fig for the intellectual treat, when participated in by stealth, and knew that this was one of Cousin Clarice's numberless silly plots. But she was weary in heart to-night—hungry for love and kindness. Cousin Clarice had been particularly trying all day; had instigated Mrs. Hartley to check and reprove her daughter, in more than one instance, and not allowed the latter one moment's quiet dialogue with Thorne. She was better, stronger, and happier, when she had a smile or sentence from him, that was intended for herself alone, and had hoped for one more good long heart-talk before his sister arrived; but this was Monday night, and she was to come on Tuesday! After that, his leisure hours would, of course, be devoted to *her*. Miriam was not jealous, or so mean of spirit as to grudge the unknown Gertrude her brother's time and love, but her heart ached hollowly at thought of her own penury. She had never before had a friend so congenial in mind and feeling—so kind, so strong, so willing to guide and help; and just as he had made himself indispensable to her comfort and happiness, she was about to lose him for whole dreary weeks—no one could tell for how much longer a time.

Feeling thus lonely, she was glad to kneel down in the friendly obscurity, pass her arm about her mother's waist, and rest her head upon her bosom, while seeming to listen to what was going on without.

Dr. Bogus had the reputation of being a finished conversationalist. And he was, if an accomplished colloquist be one who assumes as his share three-fourths of all that is said, and leaves to others the easier task of listening. His *forte* was more the declamatory, than the conversational. Nothing suited him so well as to be the cynosure of all eyes and ears, in a room-full; the larger the number present, the better, provided they hearkened and believed and admired.

Even those who avowed that he was the most delightful man alive, pondered uneasily, while in his company, upon the fact that they themselves never said any thing noteworthy, never any thing that satisfied them and won the applause of others. All sounded stale and tame beside his smooth-rolling paragraphs, his pungent humor and playful sallies. Another perplexity was, that his fine sayings did not stick in the memory. There was an impression produced, at the time, that something very grand or very amusing had been uttered; but the attempt to repeat his *bon mots* was generally a disgraceful failure, for which the retailer was blamed, since everybody laughed when the Doctor gave them to the world, and nobody smiled at the repetition.

He was in a sunny mood this evening. His day at the Mayor's had been an ovation; the parlors having been well peopled, during fashionable visiting hours, with the *élite* of Limestone and its vicinity. A large proportion of the callers were ladies—a circumstance by no means disagreeable to the courtly D. D. A black-winged, white-breasted butterfly, he had roved and fluttered among the flowers from morn to eve, and was stimulated instead of fatigued by the pleasing duty. As he sat there, in the most comfortable chair in the party, a choice weed between his lips, it was gratifying to think of the many rosy mouths that were praising him, afar off, and no drawback to the reflection, to recollect that he had kissed some half-dozen pairs of the rosiest and plumpest—he had an eye for these details—upon the score of former acquaintanceship, and felt soft, lily hands quiver in his own, as he breathed some phrase of affectionate compliment in the pretty shell-like ear, that changed from pink to scarlet, in the hearing. I am not pretending to deny that these meditations would have been of questionable propriety, if not highly reprehensible, in most

men; but, as I have said before, who objects to the harmless familiarities, the endearing tokens of esteem of a Reverend Irresistible, especially if he be handsome, captivating, and a Doctor of Divinity?

"The kiss of peace!" said Dickens's "Shepherd," at the tea-drinking described by the elder Weller, and the "kiss of peace" circulates, if not as indiscriminately, with as much gusto, in other and much higher church circles. A dozen times, since beginning this page, I have lifted my pen to erase what I have written; but since it is truth, and truth, the half of which is not told, why not let it stand? If I had the moral courage to make public what I myself have seen of this evil—for evil I do call it—my unfortunate book would be branded as a libel, by many respectable people, frowned down severely by the very teachers of righteousness, whose wives will tell you, jocosely, "There is no use in saying a word to Mr. So-and-so! He *will* kiss all the pretty girls! And where's the harm?"

Sure enough, where *is* the harm? Since my husband is not a kissing clergyman, what do I care? Since it is not your daughter, or sister, or betrothed, my gentleman reader, who is saluted with this holy (?) kiss, what business is it of yours, if all the rest of the girls in the community, who have kissable lips, are thus honored? Because we are virtuous, overmuch, shall Dr. Bogus have no more cakes and ale? Whether the tendering of these liberties, and the passive, not to say pleased, reception of the same, elevate womanhood in the eyes of the principal actors, we will leave Dr. Bogus to tell in his own way.

His audience seemed disposed to accord to him the right to lead in conversation. Dr. Stanton had obeyed an inapropos call to the town, promising to return ere long; Thorne was unusually silent, and the other ministers were constrained or overawed by the tone of superior information

and consequence that characterized the chief guest. As for the Mayor, loudly as he bragged of intimacy with the distinguished divine behind his back, he hemmed and "ah-ed" lamentably, in accosting or replying to him. Mr. Fenner, an amiable, excellent man, the pastor of one of the "down-town churches," sustained quite a conspicuous part in the conference, for a while, upon the strength of the discovery that several of his old friends belonged to Dr. Bogus's congregation. These being persons of wealth and station in their circle, the Doctor answered the questions relative to them with patronizing politeness, and conducted himself more cordially toward the modest querist, upon finding that his antecedents were so respectable.

"You know Harding's wife, I suppose?" said Mr. Fenner, prosecuting an inquiry after a college mate, now a practising lawyer in L—— and a parishioner of Dr. Bogus.

"Oh, very well! She is a handsome woman—thoroughbred and stylish—decidedly the leader of our best society. I am often at her house; indeed, there is none other in the city where I feel so much at home."

"I have never met her, but have heard repeatedly of her talents and accomplishments."

"She is accomplished beyond most other ladies—even those in her elevated sphere," rejoined the Doctor. "Her musical proficiency is unrivalled in the state—hardly surpassed in this country."

"She is a finished scholar, also, I am told," pursued Mr. Fenner. "Dr. Greene, who has known her from her childhood, says that she is mistress of Latin and Greek, beside two or three modern languages, and in *belles lettres*, a second De Stäel."

"It may be true—it must be, if Dr. Greene states it upon his own authority, and the circumstance of my never having suspected the lady of such an alarming tendency toward

blue-stockingism is not to be taken as rebutting testimony. She might possess a fair knowledge of Egyptian hieroglyphics and the dialect of Borrioboola-Gha, and I be none the wiser, unless she chose to obtrude her erudition upon my notice, and Mrs. Harding is too refined a woman of the world, to do any thing in bad taste. I am sorry to hear that she ever made pretensions to attainments so unfeminine as those you enumerate."

"Why unfeminine?"

It was Thorne's deep, rich voice which sounded refreshingly earnest and truthful, after the sneering accents to which it replied.

Dr. Bogus shrugged his shoulders, and laughed slightly, in a gentlemanly derisive way.

"A literary woman is my *bête noire*. I never encounter one, without a ludicrously vivid remembrance of a story I once read, of an Irishman's first ride, which was taken upon a mule. He was scarcely in the saddle, when the animal, by some vicious movement, got its foot into the stirrup. 'Faith, me lady,' said Pat, looking down at the creature's dilemma. 'It's yerself that manes to have the ride, is it? If ye are going to get up, *I'll* get down!'"

There was a hearty laugh, in which Thorne joined, for his tone was not yet serious, when he answered—"Very wittily said in Pat, but I am too dull to perceive the pertinence of its application to the subject in hand. How far may a woman be suffered to cultivate her intellect, without rendering herself liable to the suspicion of trying to get her foot into the stirrup? Are we, then, so insecurely mounted that we must guard jealously against the mutinous endeavor?"

Dr. Bogus waited some seconds before responding to this audacious sarcasm. It seemed that he paused to relight his cigar, or take a fresh one, and that he turned to look at the

speaker. There was certainly a tincture of haughty surprise in his voice, which he tried to change into a patronizing tone, yet more offensive to the independent youth who had questioned him.

"You are young, Mr. Thorne, and youth has its pardonable enthusiasms and fallacies. When you have made women your study for as many years as I have, you will be nearer to my theory concerning them, to wit: that of all the gifts of a beneficent Providence to the dear angels, the most useless is the power and inclination to exercise the higher intellectual faculties. To my taste, Undine was more lovable before her soul was bestowed upon her, and the author showed a profound acquaintance with man's nature, in making that epoch the date where began the diminution of her lover's regard."

"Of some men's natures—undoubtedly! We read, in a book of yet more wondrous wisdom, that swine will trample on pearls. I cannot believe that you are serious, Dr. Bogus. Would you, then, accept Iago's climax of woman's earthly aim—the conclusion which Desdemona declared to be 'lame and impotent'—'to suckle fools and chronicle small beer?'"

"Not just that—for her sons, at least, should not be fools. But she had better be the chronicler of the smallest beer that ever was brewed, than be dabbling in the inkstand with her fairy digits, and spoiling her bright eyes by poring over heathen historians—Latin verse and Greek tragedy. I would not marry a woman who knew a right angle from an acute, or the difference between the *pons asinorum* and the Rialto. I am, in moderation, a disciple of Epicurus, and Latin puddings and Hebrew pies are not so digestible as are the dainties compounded by less learned cooks. Think of a man's getting a syllogism crosswise in his throat as he masticated his roast beef, or enduring a horrible colic from having swallowed logarithms with his soup!"

"Common sense—the first requisite to a properly balanced mind, masculine or feminine—would prevent these calamities. My stomach is so constituted that it would be nauseated sooner by bad grammar or an atrocious blunder in history or science, than by either syllogisms or logarithms. I suppose judgment in this question turns upon this pivot—Do we want helpmates for our souls and minds, or mere ministers to our bodily wants? Was woman given to man for the good of the nobler or baser part of our being?"

"I should be speedily ostracized from the courts where I now meet sweetest welcome, were my private judgment of that point published," said the Doctor, speaking as one who felt secure of the approbation of his hearers. "As civilized gentlemen, we owe and yield obedience to the law and customs of the land in which we live. Civilization having refined and elevated woman far above her original standard, commands us to love and cherish the beauteous Transformed; to bask in her smiles; to sue for her favor; to live in her love;—and where is the man, unless he be ingrate or insensate, who fails to obey? Lovely and beloved, we accord to her the seat of honor in our households; clinging and confiding, we comfort and protect her—and since she is proverbially exacting and credulous, we learn 'honey vows,' whose music she may 'suck' and be satisfied. But when she transgresses the bounds of her appointed sphere, and, despising the name of wife, as synonymous with dependent, aspires to the titles of equal and co-worker, then should the majesty of manhood assert itself, and she be taught, once and for all, his imperial decree—'Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther.'"

"Very true! ah—highly appropriate! Exceedingly eloquent and—ah—laudable doctrine!" was growled from the Mayor's capacious chest.

Dr. Bogus interrupted him, as he would have brushed a fly from his nose.

"Let us, for the sake of obtaining just views of this matter, put out of sight the prejudices of our age and education; strip the subject of the beautiful and illusory drapery, in which gallant and poetic generations have enveloped it. And first, we will, if you please, look to the law and testimony most revered by us all. Woman was, so to speak, an afterthought of the Creator, an appendage to man's sovereignty, and as truly one of his subjects as were the beasts of the field—although exalted by his companionship to a position nominally higher than theirs. We are expressly told that she was made solely to gratify her lord, to solace his loneliness. From this inferior grade of humanity, she fell still lower by reason of her sin in Eden; and to the heavy 'primal curse,' was added the irreversible decree—'Thy desire shall be subject to thy husband, and *he shall rule over thee.*'

"From that hour, to the latest date down to which we are brought by the sacred writings, we find woman every where spoken of as the mere instrument of pleasure and service to man; the slave of her husband's will, and his authority to hold her in servitude maintained by laws of Divine appointment. There was no clamor of 'equal privileges' among this oppressed class, under the Theocracy. They seem to have accepted their lot, with becoming meekness, and learned contentment in their low estate. Imagine a 'woman's rights convention' being held by the daughters of Israel, in one of the tents overshadowed by the tabernacle! Is there one of us who disbelieves that the fate of Korah and his company would speedily have overtaken the presumptuous sisterhood! Nor do we find, in those primitive times, that a woman could even choose her master. Parents disposed of their daughters in betrothal and marriage, as suited their pleasure and convenience or the expediency of

the case. Nor did the magnates of the tribes consider their households complete after the espousal of one wife apiece. It is a singular, and to my mind a significant fact, that there is nowhere in Scripture a prohibition of polygamy, or the slightest reproof of the same. Jacob, the favorite and chosen of Heaven, was a polygamist; David, the man after God's own heart, had numerous wives; while Solomon's seven hundred are only objected to because there were strange women—idolaters—among them, whose influence over him was pernicious. Elkanah, the upright husband of the pious Hannah, had another, and a more shrewish consort.

"What brave old days those were, for the benevolent and popular of our sex, who are obliged, in these degenerate times, to break a dozen hearts in healing one! I cannot but linger regretfully upon the stories of patriarchal life. There is a simple grandeur, a freshness and beauty in the pictures of their family relations, which might, with benefit to us, be engrafted upon our artificial, effete system."

"You have illustrious exemplars in the maintenance of your creed," observed Thorne, in a tone of quiet contempt. "Joseph Smith and Brigham Young have done all in their power for the restoration of the glory of those 'brave old days.'"

"Mormonism is—ah—a great evil. Do you not think so, Dr. Bogus?" gasped the Mayor, in affright for the integrity of the laws he was sworn to support, yet staggered by the serious and confident manner in which his famous preacher had put forth his doctrine.

"I am too good a citizen to advocate the subversion of the existing code of laws, Mr. Lewis, and for that reason, I would not promulge openly what I have here expressed, this evening. Your friend and pastor, Mr. Thorne, dissents from me, I perceive, and, I doubt not, for reasons all-conclu-

sive to his mind. You are not the only brother clergyman, my dear sir, whom I have nearly shocked into insensibility by my ideas upon this head; but I call upon you to answer me candidly—without passion or prejudice—have I not supported my position abundantly, by reference to Holy Writ?"

"As I am the youngest, and the only unmarried man present, I prefer to give some of these gentlemen the precedence in reply," said Thorne, in calm courtesy.

A dead silence ensued. Not one of those to whom this appeal was made subscribed to the tenets just delivered, but none of them were quite prepared with arguments in reply to the astounding harangue, where truth, sophistry, and coarse sensuality were woven into a perplexing tissue. Nor did they care to provoke its author to keener sarcasms than those he was evidently disposed to vent upon Thorne.

Neale waited for the silence to become oppressive, as well as expressive of their cowardice and his disdain, and then broke it by saying, with studied carelessness—"I will not insult the learning and understanding of this goodly company by a formal recapitulation of what is so well known to the student of Jewish history, in regard to the permitted evil of polygamy. That it was in direct opposition to the original intent of the marriage institution, is obvious to the most casual reader of the Bible. To Adam, in the perfect bliss of Paradise, was given one wife, not a dozen. There is no hint of probable, much less allowable plurality in the words of the ordinance—'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh'—or, as our Saviour reiterates it—'They *twain* shall be one flesh.' Even in the 'simple grandeur' of the patriarchal ages, we find that it was an exceptional case when a private citizen had more than one partner, and the pressure of public opinion upon this matter is strongly evidenced by the comments of old Jewish writers upon

Elkanah's domestic infelicity. This was, they allege, the punishment of his sin in having wedded a second woman during the lifetime of the first. It is remarkable how stern, yet silent, was the Divine ban upon these marriages. I do not recall now a single instance where they were not followed by troubles and sorrows, so plainly resulting from the unnatural connection, that other moral is needless. In process of time, we find that an evil so great and manifest cured itself, and by the dawn of the Christian era, the custom was so far obsolete as to require no prohibition.

"Throughout the New Testament, however, there are scattered passages that, if they do not in so many words prohibit polygamy, yet sanction and authorize monogamy in terms so forcible as to amount to the same thing. Even should the body of the laity become enamored of the 'freshness and beauty' of primitive family relations, and adopt the principles and usages of olden times, we of the clergy, Dr. Bogus, could not easily overleap Paul's recommendation, 'Let a bishop be the husband of one wife.'"

"Joseph Smith interprets that into an injunction, binding upon the bishop to have one—*at least*," observed the Reverend Doctor, laughing.

"A blasphemous perversion, worthy of its author! I could say nothing more severe of the infamy of either," rejoined Thorne. "But I am ashamed of the absurdity of the position in which I find myself. I might as well enter into a labored argument to prove that the rectitude of intention and deed, commanded by the Christian's code, and the more modern statutes of man's devising, is preferable to such ignominious trickery and cheating as was practised by Jacob, in the days when the ignorance which God winked at, rested, like a thick cloud, upon the whole world. As to woman's inferiority—if muscular power and brute force—if heavy strength of intellect make a superior being, we

are the better half of humanity. There is a teamster down there, in Limestone, who has a pair of magnificent draught-horses. I often stop to admire them as they pass me in the street. Heavy bodies, thick necks, stout limbs, with large joints—they have the endurance of oxen and almost the might of elephants. Yet my friend Mr. Lee paid more for that elegant little nag of his, than their owner could ever hope to get for the span. And why? Because Firefly trots his mile in 2.36; has a pedigree longer than that of any biped aristocrat in Kentucky; is endowed with blood, mettle and beauty—and those of us who hanker after a fine horse, appreciate these advantages and take great pains and pride in keeping up the stock. Nevertheless, none of us will dispute the assertion that the world would get on poorly without draught-horses."

"An ingenious illustration, I grant," said Dr. Bogus, with insufferable condescension. "But illustration is not proof. The facts of man's sovereignty and woman's serfdom remain unaltered."

"Woman's serfdom!" repeated Thorne, warmly. "Is my left hand the serf of my right, or is either the vassal of my head? Did the bone and flesh, against which Adam's heart had throbbed but a moment before—which his arm had covered and protected, become his slave, as it grew under the moulding Hand into a slighter, more beautiful image of himself? If her share of the common curse were grievous, was it not tempered by a blessing—a promise, whose exceeding sweetness lifted up the bowed heart of our First Mother, and the hearts of her daughters, for forty centuries? Women were accounted as beasts of burden, and inferior animals at that, under the Theocracy, you more than intimate. Where, then, was the swift judgment that overtook Korah, when Miriam led her band of sisters before the multitude encamped upon the shores of the Red Sea, and raised

the song of victory, 'Sing ye to the Lord! for He hath triumphed gloriously!'"

"Moses, no doubt, composed the Te Deum, although he allowed the damsels to sing it. He delegated no authority, in civil or religious matters, to his sister. Her title of prophetess was probably only complimentary," objected the Doctor.

"Supposition is no more argument than is illustration," rejoined Thorne. "But, to proceed! Was Barak a fool, and his men effeminate cravens, when he stood before her, to whom you cannot deny the name of prophetess—the woman who dwelt under the palm-tree—her, 'to whom the children of Israel *came up for judgment*,' and said, in response to her order that he should advance against Sisera, 'If *thou* wilt go with me, I will go!' He fought bravely when she did accompany him, although she had rebuked his want of faith in the LORD, by telling him that Sisera should be sold into the hand of a woman. And when the rout was over, when the dreaded warrior lay dead in the tent of Heber, and Israel was free, whose name is put first in the authorship of the most sublime pæan ever sung by mortal? 'The inhabitants of the villages ceased—they ceased in Israel, until that I, Deborah, arose—that I arose, a mother in Israel!'"

"That sounds like an assertion of superiority—has a smack of woman's rights!" ventured Mr. Fenner.

"Deborah was a tool in the hand of the Lord, who often seeks the frailest instruments for the accomplishment of His purposes," responded Dr. Bogus.

"He chose no weak vessel in this case! If weakness were a desideratum in the deliverer, he might better have been sought among the 'sheep-folds, in the divisions of Reuben;' in 'Gilead, that abode beyond Jordan;' in the 'ships of Dan,' or the 'children of Asher upon the seashore;' the tories or cowards, that shared in the curse of

Meroz, because they 'came not up to the help of the LORD against the mighty;' not in the tent of the heroine-poetess, who won for Israel a rest of forty years. We hear no clamor of 'equal privileges,' in those early ages; but we *do* find women whose wisdom saved cities and reconciled royal feuds; whose faith preserved their households from famine, and broke the seals of death; a 'virtuous woman,' whose 'price was above rubies,' the wonderful portrait that will outlast time; a Hannah, whose piety gave Israel their purest and ablest prophet-judge; a Ruth's gentle domestic virtues, entitling her to the honor of a special and minute biography from an inspired pen; a royal Esther, rescuing her nation from imminent destruction—besides a longer catalogue of minor characters, each of whom served her generation as strength and opportunity were given her.

"Then—the bitterness of the curse pronounced in Eden was forgotten in the great glory crowning a woman, in the grotto of Bethlehem, and from that hour of abundant compensation, her reproach has been taken away. Shall we refuse the names of equal and co-laborer to her whom our Master designated by signal favors as His associate and friend? her, who was 'last at the cross, and earliest at the grave?' If Martha served Him in the cottage home of Bethany, Mary sat at His feet and heard His word, drank into her spirit and understanding the utterances that baffled the Rabbinical querists, and confounded His disciples, until He vouchsafed to give them the key. We, in our self-conceit and monopoly of wisdom, may decide that Lazarus should have been left to entertain the Master, and that Mary ought to have joined her sister in the kitchen; but He saw degradation in Martha's cumbering cares, and a holy fitness in Mary's rapt, receptive spirit. Judge ye who is the wiser—He who created, or we who underrate this one of his best works! If the chiefest among the apostles

has left to us the grateful mention of his 'true yoke-fellows,' Chloe and Persis, and Claudia, Eunice and Lois; if he disdained not Priscilla as an ally with her husband; accepted Lydia's hospitality and counted her conversion great gain to the church; while the names of the neophytes, 'Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman called Damaris,' are registered side by side—*dare* we, in arrogant complacency and narrow-minded disingenuousness, call that common which the LORD has blessed; deny to the souls and intellects that breathe and glow with His life, as do ours—their full growth, their rightful sustenance?"

Neale always spoke rapidly when excited, and his young blood was at flood-tide. He had arisen, as the discussion waxed warm, and his voice pealed in harmonious flow, through the piazza and the darkened parlor. There was a momentary pause, and Dr. Bogus moved back his chair.

"I have, in my pocket, an invitation to address a female college, in another state, Mr. Thorne. Since I cannot accept the flattering offer, I shall take great pleasure in suggesting you as a fitting substitute. The oration you have so kindly bestowed upon us would, if amplified and elaborated, 'tell' finely before such an audience."

"Your good-will makes you over-sanguine, sir," replied Thorne, unmoved by the irony. "The institution that would select Dr. Bogus as its mouth-piece, on such an occasion, would not be satisfied with me, nor I with it."

There was a slight hysterical sound in the direction of Mr. Fenner's chair, as if that man of peace had caught his breath at this daring impertinence; but Dr. Bogus' buckler of temper was proof against arrows of this sort. No shield of rhinoceros hide, steel-plated, was ever tougher, when he willed it to be so. He laughed, as he got up—the same well-bred escape of derision his lips had emitted at the beginning of the debate.

"I congratulate the future Mrs. Thorne upon the gallantry—I will not say the wilful blindness—of her sex's champion! If to her belongs the credit of having indoctrinated and inspired you, I am ready to pronounce her the nonpareil of women. What say you to me as a father confessor, and these brethren as confidantes? Tell us the name and abiding-place of this peerless angel. When, where, and how did you first imbibe these fancies of the exaltation of womanhood? I am too well versed in *les affaires du cœur*, to believe that you took them in the natural way. There has been skilful and effectual inoculation here. Courage! in the presence of these friends, you may safely divulge the appellation of your fair teacher and ideal."

A whole minute went by. Some of the little company anticipated a wordy battle of personalities; others feared the discomfiture of their sturdy young neighbor. Dr. Bogus was preparing to speak again, when Thorne's voice—low, and full of strange and solemn music—made reply:

"I learned the purity, the wealth, the dignity of woman's nature, from *my Mother!*—now, indeed, an angel; but an angel in Heaven. If I am ever permitted to meet her in that home, I hope to thank her aright, as I have never been able to do here, for her agency in leading me thither!"

He walked to the other end of the porch.

"Gentlemen!" said Dr. Bogus, with unruffled politeness, "we are neglecting the ladies. Shall we return to the parlor?"

As they moved, Cousin Clarice sprang across the floor, like a cat, to the table, where stood the lamp, and, by a touch, filled the room with light. Mrs. Hartley exchanged her seat for one further from the window. Miriam was nowhere to be seen.

Neale stepped off the piazza into the gravel walk, and took a turn or two in the garden, to tone down his spirits

and thoughts, before re-entering the house. The ramble led him around to the west porch, and he chose that entrance, pausing in the doorway, to pluck a sprig of honeysuckle. As he did so, something white floated from within the deeper shade of the vines; bowed low before him; caught his hand and bent over it, and was gone before he could intercept it.

"Miriam!"

But nothing replied, and so rapidly had the scene passed, that he was skeptical as to its reality. Was it a dream—a vision—a trick of imagination—or had she knelt to him there—touched his hand to her forehead; and was that warm drop upon his fingers a tear?

CHAPTER XIV.

A MUTUAL DISAPPOINTMENT.

MIRIAM had never prepared for another interview with the trepidation she felt in getting ready for her first visit to Gertrude Thorne. She had intended to call, with her mother and Cousin Clarice, upon Wednesday, the day after Miss Thorne's arrival, but was detained at home by some young company, whom she could not leave. Mrs. Hartley and her cousin brought back extremely favorable accounts of the pastor's sister. Cousin Clarice was particularly voluble in praise of her "finish of manner," and "graceful fluency of speech;" her "high-bred tone," and "easy affability;" and the more she lauded, the more thoughtful and silent Miriam became. She dreaded, yet desired unspeakably, to have the meeting over; to see for herself, how far Neale was correct in saying that Gertrude was his feminine counterpart. He invited her to walk down to Mr. Fry's with him, after supper, that same evening, but again the fates—this time in the guise of a thunderstorm—prevented the expedition.

So, on Thursday afternoon, she stood before her mirror, tying on her bonnet, and examining her image in the glass, with a dissatisfied aspect. "Miss Thorne dressed in exquisite taste," was Cousin Clarice's report, and she was a competent judge of toilettes.

"Make yourself as charming as you can, my dear!" she had said, meeting Miriam on her way up-stairs. "These sisters are sometimes influential counsellors."

Miriam did not deign a reply, beyond a scornful look, but the shaft went home. In vain she asked herself why she should care for the sister's approbation, since the brother's friendship was secure, and railed at her pitiful fear of a woman who, she had been assured by him who knew her most intimately, was not her superior in breeding or education. A feeling of miserable self-depreciation weighed her down; robbed her of bloom and animation; shook hands and knees to faintness and trembling. She tried to scan her features and figure, as reflected in the glass, with a stranger's eye, and the result was disheartening enough. Cheeks pale to sallowness, orbs of lustreless hazel, with green and yellow streaks diversifying the pupil; bluish-white lips, compressed to stern gravity; a dress of dun-colored tissue; white mantle, white bonnet—the rosebuds within its brim the only specks of bloom in the picture; the effect was flat, monotonous, well nigh repulsive.

The walk might have brought the needed coloring and light to her face, but for the suspense that increased at every step. She had to stop at Mr. Fry's gate, to collect courage and breath, and even the servant who answered her ring was struck by her unusual appearance, and the tremor in her voice, as she inquired whether the ladies were at home.

"Are you sick, Miss Mir'um? Come in, and sit down, and let me fetch you a glass of water! You look mighty poorly!"

"Thank you, Sally—but I am not sick. Are your mistress and Miss Thorne at home?"

"No'm—they aint. They've gone out ridin', with Marster and Mr. Thorne. They'll be dreadful sorry to miss you, for they've 'spected you all day. Won't you step in, and wait 'til they come back?"

"Oh, no! Please say that I called, and give this to Miss Thorne."

She handed, with her card, a bouquet of her finest flowers, with which she had provided herself—impelled by the vague sense that a propitiatory offering might be serviceable in approaching the awful presence. Then she went down the steps at a bound, and set her face homeward, with a bright countenance and a lightened heart.

"The worst is past! I shall never have to face her alone, now. When she returns the call, Mamma and Cousin Clarice will do most of the talking, and at home I am never awkwardly embarrassed."

She inwardly determined moreover, as foolishly as many other inexperienced girls in her position have done, to be very circumspect in dress, behavior, and speech, when that call should be made; to act as much like a proper, full-grown young lady, and as unlike Miriam Hartley as her nature and habits would allow. It was an unwise—an absurd idea, in one whose individuality was so marked; but, within a few days, Miriam had become strangely sensitive to the opinion of others. She did not analyze the cause of this overweening diffidence; this horror of reluctance, mixed with desire to encounter Mrs. Fry's guest, nor why she studiously concealed the existence of the feeling from Thorne.

"If she would only believe what he says of me! for I believe that he *is* my friend—if she would not transfix me with the impartial, critical glance women always bestow upon strangers of their own sex—I could make her like me, I know! But I will find out when she is coming, and do my best."

Mrs. Hartley and Cousin Clarice had driven into town, to pay calls; for Miss Stanton was an indefatigable slave to society. The house was overrun by her company, all the time she was there. She returned each call with religious exactness and punctuality, and, disliking to go alone, dragged Mrs. Hartley or her daughter around with her. Miriam

ran up to her room, tore off each article of the show apparel, donned her wonted uniform of white and scarlet—still admissible by reason of the lingering summer weather—and started down to the grove at the back of the house, in quest of Willie. She was relieved, comforted, joyous—and ran races, romped, and played horses with the child, until the redness of the sinking sun reminded her that there were others coming home, for whose sake a certain amount of setting to rights must be gone through, both with her dress and the boy's.

"Come, my pet!" she said, picking up her straw garden hat from the grass, "we must go home and get ready to see Grandpapa, when he comes in. I think my man will look better when he has clean trowsers on. You stained those green and brown, when you rolled down hill just now. And these little hands! I don't remember that I ever saw them when they needed soap and water more than they do at present."

Willie was a remarkably neat child; one to whom, as the common saying is, "the dirt would not stick." He was mortified at the damage done to his appearance, and hesitated to let Miriam touch his soiled fingers.

"They will dirty your hands and dress, Milly!" he objected, rubbing them vigorously with a tiny square of linen, dignified by the name of handkerchief, which he took from his pocket.

"I am not afraid! There! I do not believe that you can get any more off by dry scrubbing, and it will certainly not come off on my hands. Now, for a fast run!"

Willie was out of breath when they reached the shrubbery surrounding the house, and she stopped to let him rest.

"Why, manny! you are quite broken down, while I am as fresh as ever—not a bit tired!"

"That is because my legs are not very big or very strong,

you know," replied the boy, in sorrowful apology. "Milly, I am afraid that I will never be a great, high man, like Mr. Thorne."

"Oh, yes, you will! You have grown a whole inch this summer, and reach almost to my elbow. By another year I shall not be able to carry you on my shoulder—you will be so large."

"Then"—Willie looked up, a roguish smile curling the corners of his mouth—"you ought to carry me *very* often now, while you can."

"Oh, you cunning monkey!" cried Miriam, snatching him up, and swinging his light weight to her shoulder more easily than a modern fine lady would have done a babe half a year old. "You deserve a ride for that hint!"

Holding fast one of his hands, while he passed the other arm around her head to steady himself, she danced along the terrace, singing—Willie's sweet but weak voice chiming in with hers, in his favorite ditty—"Wait for the Wagon." They traversed the whole length of the back portico twice, and entered the wide central hall, where the performances were to be concluded by a grand fancy-dance, in which neither waltz, chassée, nor backstep was to be wanting.

"Together on life's journey
We'll travel, till we stop,
And if we have no trouble,
We'll reach the happy top!"

sang Miriam, with a slide, a skip, and a whirl, that should have brought her to the front entrance, but Willie's convulsive clasp of her throat arrested her in mid-career.

The double-leaved door stood open all summer long, and, partially blinded by dizziness and surprise, she yet distinguished but too clearly the figures that closed it up now—Neale Thorne and a lady, whom poor Miriam could not fail to recognize. The lilac silk dress, the parasol and gloves to

match, the rich lace shawl, worn so gracefully over the sloping shoulders, the pure chip hat, with its drooping spray of lilac blossoms—all the neatness and faultless taste of her attire was taken in with the same glance that beheld the handsome oval face, delicate in complexion, and regular in features—its expression now a calm amazement, heightened, to Miriam's apprehension, by inward disdain of the unseemly exhibition she had interrupted.

Neale made some laughing observation, totally thrown away upon the actors in the late scene. Willie was dismounted in a trice, and remained standing in the middle of the hall, shyly irresolute as to his best mode of action, until Miss Thorne, having acknowledged the introduction to her "brother's friend," accosted him.

"Will you not come and speak to me, dear? This is your pet—the Willie, of whom I have heard so often—is it not, brother?"

"It is. Willie, my boy—here is my sister—Miss Gertrude Thorne. You must shake hands with her, for my sake."

Willie advanced readily, his large eyes raised wistfully and curiously to the stranger's face, and was on the point of putting his hand into hers, when he happened to observe the spotless glove, covering the palm, opened ready to receive him, and the sight recalled to memory the doubtful cleanliness of his own fingers. Instantly the little hands were clapped behind his back, his countenance fell, and, lacking strength to run away, or the presence of mind to excuse himself, he appeared the reverse of his true character—like a sulky, unmannerly child. Only Miriam understood the action, and she had not, at the moment, the spirit to explain it.

"Run away, dear, to Amy, and let her get you ready!" she said softly, in passing him, and led the way into the

parlor, distressfully aware of her creased muslin, her heated face, and disordered hair.

Neale was the most talkative person of the three. He did not consider that the principal charm of a lady's coiffure lay in the smoothness and sheen of her tresses. A sleek head—he had been heard to complain—reminded him of a hair-cloth sofa, and in common with most other gentlemen, he preferred waving or curling locks. What his sister thought rough and frowzy, was, to him, Nature's attempt to restore curves to the bandeaux Art had plastered down in straight lines. Nor was there any thing unbecoming in Miriam's flushed forehead. She looked well enough, if she were only less constrained in manner, more easy in language; if her hands had not sought one another continually, and her fingers been overlapped so nervously.

Could it be that there was any seriousness in the suddenly-remembered question she had asked him weeks ago? Was she actually overawed by his sister? The supposition was preposterous—utterly unreasonable! Yet he wished that Gertrude would be less stately, more social with one he had extolled so highly, commended so strongly to her regard. Women's whims of etiquette were contemptible, and the adherence to this one of them, by both the new acquaintances, was extremely provoking. Why must they feel their way as cautiously toward mutual friendship, as if they had never heard each other's names up to the moment of their presentation?

He rattled away, with an account of his sister's chagrin at finding Miriam's card upon her return from her ride—chagrin he could not solace, except by offering to escort her forthwith to Dr. Stanton's, that she might foil her manifest destiny, by a *coup d'état*, and achieve the meeting so long desired, so often frustrated. There he halted, for now Gertrude could not help taking up the thread he had dropped.

She did, but her first words were the terms he detested.

"The etiquette of custom would have dictated a delay of some length before repaying your call, Miss Hartley, but my brother assured me that you would overlook my want of formality, and I was naturally desirous to express to you something of our gratitude for your attentions to him during his recent indisposition. Grieved as we were by the tidings of his casualty, we could not but be thankful that he had so pleasant a home, and that kind friends ministered to his every want. My sisters requested me to present their acknowledgments, with my own, when I should have the pleasure of seeing you. We feel that your family have laid ours under lasting obligations—such as we can never repay."

Here was a very neat formula! very proper—very polished—polished as ice, in fact, as cold, and as pleasant to handle. A mute touch of an ungloved hand, a misty gleam of that dark-blue eye—a quaver of that even voice—were worth a thousand such! Miriam took up the icy crystal, and laid it to heart, where it froze her into numbness.

"We did very little for him," she answered, and she so strove to say it steadily that her tone was hard and dry.

"Gertrude knows better than that!" replied Thorne, seeing that she had no addition to make to this brief rejoinder. "But for Dr. Stanton I might never have wagged a finger again; but for your mother, I must have starved—and my friends would never have heard that I was hurt until I was well, had you not officiated as my amanuensis. And what about those two weeks of sermon-writing?"

"What about them, indeed?" groaned Miss Thorne, inwardly. "I only hope that they may not have wrought irreparable mischief to you and yours!"

Miriam was not to be jested into sprightliness; nor did Miss Thorne part once with her punctilious politeness. They talked on like moderately sensible, commonplace

women, who had no affinity the one for the other, eschewing alike originality and familiarity. Neale's disappointment and vexation were fast rising to a pitch whose climax might have been a very candid expression of his sentiments regarding this "foolery," as he mentally anathematized it—when a curb was put upon him by the return of Mrs. Hartley and Cousin Clarice.

The latter tripped delightedly up to Miss Thorne.

"This is an unexpected treat! I am so glad that we have arrived in season to share in the pleasure of your visit! Cousin Miriam—could you not persuade Miss Thorne to remove her bonnet and shawl, and spend the evening with us? Even though you have refused her, Miss Thorne, cannot we induce you to reconsider your resolution? This is your brother's home, you must recollect, and we will not receive formal calls from you in this dwelling."

This was kind and thoughtful—the very thing Miriam ought to have done twenty minutes earlier, but she had not been sufficiently collected to reflect upon the obvious propriety of this act of ordinary civility. Cousin Clarice had the luck or the cunning always to send her apparently random darts through the joints of her young cousin's harness.

Mrs. Hartley seconded Miss Stanton's solicitations, less fussily, but as cordially. Most people, if situated as was the little spinster, would have waited for the nominal hostess to make the original motion, but Cousin Clarice suffered no diffident scruples to keep her in the background.

Miss Thorne declined their united importunities, pleasantly, yet decidedly. She had "promised Mrs. Fry that she would not be tempted to remain over half an hour, and she believed that she had discovered the reason of the stringent orders laid upon her that she should keep her word. Mrs. Fry foresaw how difficult obedience would be."

"Why couldn't she talk to Miriam as she talks to that humbug!" thought Thorne, out of patience with the exchange of pressing entreaty and graceful refusal.

Miriam's furtive look at him at that unlucky instant, detected the shade of discontent, and she very reasonably connected it with her dereliction in hospitality. How could she be so negligent? What must he think of the slight offered to his sister, after he had waived ceremony in bringing her to his adopted home this afternoon? Oh! what a miserable, miserable end to the dream-pictures she had painted of Gertrude's visit and intimacy with herself! She had disgusted the sister; the brother was ashamed of his choice of a friend. The meeting, the interview, her appearance and deportment—all were failures—lamentable and irretrievable! Humbled and dispirited, she did not attempt a reply to Cousin Clarice's inquiry as to the urgency of the persuasions she had *not* made; but everybody present must understand that she had been rudely forgetful or purposely uncivil—it mattered little which. It was over now! with much besides, that had better never have been!

Plunged in despondency, that looked like haughty listlessness, she sat in her corner—her one pleasurable emotion the perception of the growing duskiness on that side of the room—while Cousin Clarice assumed the agreeable duty of entertaining Miss Thorne. Neale's divination of the silent girl's musings was imperfect, and, in part, erroneous, but he saw that she was not happy, and the day had passed when a cloud upon her face did not darken his spirit.

He left the neighborhood of the busy talkers, and went over to her.

"Why are you so grave and reserved—so unlike yourself?" he asked, with his customary frankness. "You are not offended at our speedy return of your visit, are you?"

"No! why should I be?"

Her voice sounded sharp; how could he guess that it was the sharpness of pain?

"I see how it is," continued Thorne, in the same cautious undertone he had used before, "you are disappointed in Gertrude. I am to blame for leading you to expect more warmth of language, more openness of manner, a more demonstrative personage, altogether. But she will soon thaw out. She means nothing but kindness and good-will, and is prepared to do more than like—to *love* you."

The meaning of the cadence with which the last words were uttered would have been intelligible, beyond mistake, to a vainer or a happier woman. Miriam's thought was only—"*Was* prepared, he ought to have said! She has changed her mind since she has seen me!"

Miss Thorne was not so engrossed by her engaging neighbor as to be regardless of this by-play. She heard nothing except her brother's low, gentle tone; but she did not like the somewhat dim outline of his figure, bending over Miriam's chair, or the inflection, that, unnoticed by the ears for which it was intended, reached the sister's jealous senses.

"Neale—brother!" she called, "you will have to bear the brunt of Fanny's displeasure if I overstay my leave of absence."

"Very well! it will not be my maiden experience of that kind!" then turning again to Miriam—"Mrs. Fry charged me with a message to you. She forbade me to show my face within her doors this evening, unless I brought you along. I imagine from a remark which she dropped, that she has some business of importance to transact with her prime minister."

"I am obliged to her and to you, but I cannot go."

"Why not, my love?" asked Mrs. Hartley, "I will attend to Willie. He is very well contented with me, when you are not in the house."

"There are other reasons why I cannot accept Mrs. Fry's kind invitation, ma'am. Please say to her, Mr. Thorne, that the affairs of state must be indefinitely postponed."

How hard it was to speak lightly, with that ball of hot lead rolling and swelling in her throat!

"I think that our Miriam is right, dear cousin," said Cousin Clarice, clippingly. "The necessary alterations in her dress would occupy a considerable time, and Mrs. Fry's supper would be kept waiting."

Ignorant of any covert meaning in this excuse, Neale met it in good faith by saying, "If a grand toilette is indispensable for the occasion, I will walk down with my sister: notify Mrs. Fry, that you are coming, and return for you. She never minds a slight irregularity in the time of serving her meals, if she can secure good company by so doing."

"Indeed, you must not think of such a thing! I cannot go!" returned the girl so earnestly, that no one pushed the matter further.

"It is a great pity that you changed your dress after coming back from Mr. Fry's, Miriam, my love!" Cousin Clarice said, before the departing guests were fairly out of the yard. "I have felt *so* sorry for you! I know how these seeming trifles destroy one's peace of mind in certain circumstances."

Parker had brought in the parlor lamp, as the Thornes were leaving, and Miriam lingered a moment, from the force of habit, to close the shutters.

"You do not look quite as neat as usual, daughter," observed Mrs. Hartley—her attention thus directed to the tumbled skirt and hair—"How did it happen that you were caught in such a plight?"

Miriam was spared the trouble of answering by Willie's entry, radiant in the glories of his best suit—a blue embroidered jacket and white linen trowsers; pomatum upon his curls, and millefleur sprinkled over his clean handkerchief.

"Oh, Milly! have they gone?"

"Yes, dear."

"Isn't that too bad! Why didn't you keep them until I was fit to be seen? You see, mamma, we were playing out-of-doors, Milly and I, horse and hare and hounds—such fun! and because I got tired racing, Milly rode me on her shoulder, and we were just going up-stairs to wash and brush up, you understand, when we met Mr. Thorne and his pretty, nice sister, right in the door. Milly couldn't get away, but I did, and I would have showed them that I wasn't always so dirty, only Amy was so slow dressing me."

"But, Willie, my sweet, don't you know that you should never be unfit to see company, at certain hours?"

Cousin Clarice stopped to kiss him exactly in Miriam's path—and burning with impatience to get away, she was yet obliged to stand still and take the lashes adroitly aimed at her over Willie's shoulders.

"It is not well-bred, my precious, to run away, or to need to hide from visitors on account of one's dress; when it is the right time of the day to receive calls, you should always look so neat—have your clothes and hair in such perfect order, as not to fear comparison with other people, however elegantly they may be dressed."

"Comparison!" repeated the puzzled child, catching at the longest and least familiar word, "what is the meaning of that, Cousin Clarice?"

"Help me to explain, Miriam—please!" entreated Cousin Clarice, with the most innocently appealing smile; "you are better versed than I am in baby-talk."

"Willie is no baby: nor do I suppose that it is essential for him to comprehend the drift of your observation, so long as *I* do," said Miriam, trying to pass.

Cousin Clarice laid her hand upon her shoulder—"Dear cousin! why will you be so suspicious? May I not con-

tribute my mite toward the formation of our darling boy's principles and habits?"

"Not if I can prevent it, while your object is to make him unhappy, and teach him to despise his best friends! He shall respect me, if no one else does!"

"Miriam!" exclaimed Mrs. Hartley, shocked and grieved, "how can you speak so to your cousin? Your judgment is too hasty—too harsh."

"Never, where you are concerned, Mamma!" was the sadly respectful rejoinder.

She could not trust herself to say more. In her own room she wept hot, indignant tears, mingled with more bitter drops of self-abasement; a sense of dire humiliation and inferiority.

"Oh! if I were only like other women—handsome, graceful, polished! What do I care for intellect, independence and education!—for courage, strength and health! These cannot buy me love and esteem!"

It was morbid mourning; but her premises were not false. Life is short, and women are many. Men have not time for more than a superficial examination of each one, and to her who crowds her best goods into the showcase, is awarded the highest prize. Nine people out of ten, who met the cousins in society, adjudged Miss Stanton to be the lovelier and better of the two. She proved her angelic attributes by meeting Miriam at the supper-table with a smile of sweet forgiveness, and by her manifest anxiety that she should not be slighted by her mother and grandfather, in the family conclave. She pressed each dainty of the bounteous board upon her acceptance; requested her opinion before giving her own; was lavish of tender epithets to her, and glozingly fond of Willie. Miriam was never a match for her in deceit, and, as may be supposed, these pertinacious overtures met with slender encouragement. She was wise

enough, however, to restrain any actual exhibition of aversion—forbearance which, we are compelled to say, did not contribute to Cousin Clarice's inward comfort.

Meanwhile the brother and sister walked slowly down the road—yclept "street" by courtesy—leading to Mr. Fry's. Both were thoughtful, and neither was overpleased with the other. We have seen what cause Neale fancied that he had for censuring his best-beloved relative's conduct toward the real, if, as yet, unavowed lady of his heart's choice, and we all know how much weight is to be attached to the conclusions a man forms in like circumstances. If there be such an anomalous disease as the rose-colored jaundice, then is Love that wonderful transmogrifier. But his companion—how was it with her? We will hearken, for an instant, to a wiser oracle than my dazed, stammering Pythoness.

Says CHARLOTTE BRONTE,—"Sisters do not like young ladies to fall in love with their brothers. It seems, if not presumptuous, silly, weak, a delusion, an absurd mistake. *They* do not love these gentlemen—whatever sisterly affection they may cherish toward them—and that others should, repels them with a sense of crude romance. The first movement, in short, excited by such a discovery (as with many parents at finding their children to be in love), is one of mixed impatience and contempt. Reason—if they be rational people—corrects the false feeling in time; but if they be irrational, it is never corrected, and the daughter or sister-in-law is disliked to the end."

Gertrude Thorne was a rational woman, and a woman of many excellences and shining virtues. She admitted to herself and others the expediency, bordering upon necessity, of her brother's speedy marriage. It would conduce greatly to his happiness and usefulness in his peculiar and delicate position, she was wont to represent—provided, always, that he made a judicious selection of a helpmate. But this "pro-

vided" included a more extended area than did the famous bullock's hide, by means of which the colonists outwitted the Indians. Added to the list of needful qualifications for the consort of Neale Thorne, the man, was a column even longer, of imperative requisites to be possessed by the wife of the minister; not to mention a brief item or two that would greatly increase the satisfaction and comfort of the Rev. Neale Thorne's sisters. There was nothing irrational in these stipulations—on the contrary, nothing could be more reasonable and advisable; but opposed to the chances of the celibate pastor's finding the embodiment of this symmetrical ideal, was mainly the rugged fact that such a woman had not yet been created. No doubt she ought to have been; for she was then, as now, perpetually and minutely described and diligently inquired after in the coteries of every parish whose spiritual leader was a bachelor. The urgency and frequency of the demand should have induced a brisk manufacture of the article; yet, up to the time when this cherished kinsman reached a marriageable age, there was no promise of her coming.

The certainty of Miss Thorne's disappointment, let Neale choose whomsoever he might, is thus demonstrated tolerably conclusively; but there are divers grades of discomfiture, and it behooved him, as a dutiful and loving brother, to let down her anticipations as little and as gently as he could. He had not designed to wound or shock her by his selection, but he had done it, and very cruelly. Her affection for him was too strong, and its instinct too keen, for her to misinterpret his manner of speaking of his scribe, nurse, and friend, Miss Hartley. It was palpable to her before she came to Limestone, that his sentiments in regard to the young lady in question, had undergone a material change since he described her as "rather singular, but quite pleasant." His letters half prepared her for the true state of the

affair, and she was quick to note that he was reserved on the subject, when Mr. or Mrs. Fry was by, yet invariably introduced it in the most confidential chapters of their private confabulations. He talked eloquently of Miriam's nobility of soul; her rare gifts of intellect; her generous, loving temper; her refinement, delicacy, filial devotion; her beautiful care of and tenderness to Willie, and—the one point that grated upon Gertrude's perceptions—her originality. In fine, he never wearied of proving her superiority to every other woman in the world. No need, after this, of saying, in plain prose, "I love Miriam Hartley, and intend to ask her to marry me!" Gertrude was as well informed as to this design as he meant that she should be.

And having thus, with the proverbial tact of lovers, prepared the way for the appearance of this apotheosis of femininity, he led his sister up to a tearing romp of a madcap girl, neither beautiful nor sylphlike; with a head like a colt's mane, on a windy day; arrayed in a crushed, rumpled muslin dress, that looked as if the wind had had its fun with that also; a dirty little boy perched upon her shoulder, and she dancing in the most public part of the house, to the music of an Ethiopian melody!

CHAPTER XV.

GERTRUDE.

As has been stated in a previous chapter, one of the Rev. Neale Thorne's idiosyncrasies was a horror of old maidism, or, rather, the legion of obstinate and unreasonable caprices usually thus denominated. Great would have been his dismay, and deep his wrath, had he been told that there was a fair prospect of his having, in a few years, a spinster sister, not merely tinctured, but dyed with the peculiarities of the abhorred class. Gertrude Thorne was still young and handsome—attractive enough to have won a husband by her looks alone; but she had counted twenty-six summers, and been, for several years, the only single daughter of the family. Her brother had spent so little time with her during that period, that he failed to note how, with her, neatness was being refined into absurd particularity; a naturally just sense of fitness and propriety into fastidious nicety; firmness of principle and independent action into dogmatism.

To him she was yet his confidante and indulgent co-adviser, who when they did differ in opinion, yielded always to the arguments she could not refute. He had hoped that she would like Miriam. It had been a darling wish with him, that the solitary girl should find in her the sister and friend, for whom he knew she longed, and that his home should be also Gertrude's. He was not a man to resign readily a project that was the joint offspring of his heart and head, and Gertrude should have recollected this before engaging

in the task she believed herself called by duty and affection to undertake. This insane fancy—this unaccountable infatuation—this unhappy entanglement, growing out of propinquity; the *ennui* of a convalescent's idle hours, and gratitude to her whose society relieved their tedium, *must* be overcome, conquered, broken off! She trusted that Miriam's feelings were not interested. It was certain that they ought not to be, since there had been no declaration of attachment from the gentleman. But should this wild, untutored girl be as ill-regulated in heart and mind as in deportment, and have suffered herself to take that for granted which a well-trained maiden would never suspect until it was driven home to her conviction by vows—sounding and explicit—why, it would be a pity! Still, the hand that held the lopping-knife must not shrink. Miss Thorne's chin and mouth were not cast in the same firm mould as her brother's to no purpose.

It was not doubt of the righteousness of her judgment, or wavering resolution, that held her silent, for the first quarter of the way. She was pondering upon the best and most effective mode of carrying out her intentions without risk of delay—which she felt was fearfully dangerous in this case. Neale might propose to-morrow—this very evening—whenever he liked. Opportunities were abundant and tempting, and the engagement once formed, she was too conscientious to think of breaking it.

"Well, Gertrude!"

Her heart ached at the frank sunshine of his smile, and the thought of the trial she was preparing for him. But she smiled too.

"Well, Neale, dear! what is it that you wish to know?"

"How you like my home—and friends."

"Your home is all that I expected to see, from your pictures of its beauty and comfort. Some day you must show

me your room—the 'Castle,' from which I have had so many welcome letters."

"You shall see it, whenever you like. And my friends—what of them?"

"Mrs. Hartley is very lovely. I could not help thinking, as I looked at and listened to her, of those words: 'The law of kindness is in her mouth.' She is a genuine lady."

"Very true. Go on!" Thorne struck off a thistle-top with his cane.

"I like Miss Stanton, also. She is a person of education and refinement, and, apparently, great warmth of heart. I should say that she has been purified by severe afflictions, and now seeks her happiness in promoting that of others."

"Her very phrase—I declare!" ejaculated the listener—and the road-side boasting quite a hedge of thistles, another superb Turk's head went whistling across the highway.

"My use of it is a chance coincidence—for she has said nothing of the kind in my hearing—that I remember."

"I'll engage that she has regaled you with that, or a similar tit-bit! She has an exhaustless supply. But let her pass! What do you think of Miss Hartley?"

He asked the question so squarely and manfully, that Gertrude dared not return the reply ready formed upon her tongue.

"That is not a fair inquiry, Neale," she said gravely.

"I beg your pardon—but I cannot see its unfairness. I do not expect you to be prepared with an analysis of her mind and character. I only seek to learn the general effect produced upon you by the little intercourse you have had with her."

"My impressions were not favorable, I confess."

Her heart beat fast, in uttering the introductory sentence of condemnation. Neale's answer was unperturbed.

"So I observed. What are the grounds of your prejudice?"

"Do not call it prejudice, brother! I went prepared to like and admire one, of whom you had related so many pleasant and interesting things. You cannot wonder that I was chilled and disappointed."

"Walk slowly! I am in no haste to reach Mr. Fry's. What chilled and disappointed you?"

"In the first place, then, since you will have me speak openly—the disorder visible in Miss Hartley's dress, and her want of dignity—shall I say, her hoydenishness? shocked me."

"I noticed that her dress was less smooth than usual, although perfectly clean; that the fabric had lost its starched stiffness, which typifies propriety in feminine opinion. But she had been playing out-of-doors with her nephew, and probably forgot that one of the chief ends of woman's life is to look always as if she had just stepped from a bandbox, and to walk upon a rectilinear chalk-mark. It is not in the nature of her hair to adhere closely to her head, and retain the exact shape in which it is twisted, like Cousin Clarice's oily foretop—faugh! and cork-screw curls. Why *will* ladies daub their heads with grease, like filthy savages? The swift motion, in the fresh air, tossed up the brown waves a little roughly, I grant, but that did not argue carelessness in the wearer of the tresses. You are entirely wrong in imputing to her want of dignity. She has more of the *real* commodity than any other person I know."

"Oh, brother! brother!"

"She has! I defy any man not to respect Miriam Hartley! Her innate purity and self-respect constrain a feeling akin to reverence in all who approach her. I bowed before it in our earliest acquaintanceship, and a nearer communion has but increased the emotion."

"Do not be vexed that I cannot see her with your eyes—

but I had expected something so different! and when I beheld the untidy figure whirling through the hall, chanting a low, silly song, and the soiled hands and clothes of the child who is her charge, my heart sank within me."

"If my memory serves me aright, I used to stain and tear my trowsers shockingly when I was twice Willie's age. The greatest fault I find with his aunt's management of him is, that she has made him a genuine Miss Nancy in point of personal neatness. I think that children are more comfortable and healthy when they are allowed to roll in the dirt like pigs," responded Neale, with wicked perversity.

Gertrude was provoked. "I should judge that she is endeavoring to practise your precepts in this respect!"

"I hope so. Seriously, my dear sister, you have too much sense and too good a heart to allow the accidental disarray of Miss Hartley's apparel, and her harmless frolic with her adopted child, to influence your estimate of her intrinsic worth. Willie is scrupulously cleanly in his habits and dress, and ten minutes later all traces of the frolic upon the grass-plat would have been effaced. He is a thoughtful, fragile child, and his aunt encourages him in active sports and out-door amusements, in the hope of strengthening his constitution. That she is herself his playfellow, redounds to her credit, instead of being blameworthy."

Thus far Neale had spoken pleasantly—most of the time smilingly, even when his words were sarcastic, and Gertrude was emboldened, by his perfect temper and the moderation of his concluding remarks, to make a more direct attack.

"But, surely, Neale, while these wild romps may not be wrong in a young and lively girl, who has grown up somewhat too much after the Western fashion, they would be exceedingly unbecoming in a minister's wife?"

"Would they?" asked Thorne, indifferently. "I have never thought of that."

"My darling brother!" cried the enraptured Gertrude. "What a weight you have lifted from my spirit! How foolish I was to trouble myself with such ridiculous fancies. I was sure that you were in love with this Miriam."

"And so I am!"

She stopped still, and gazed at him. "Yet never thought of marrying her?" she said, bewildered.

"Indeed I *have* thought of it night and day—for a month and more!"

Neale leaned against the fence, and seemed very willing to remain where he was for the present. Over his sister's fair face passed a cloud of sorrow, amazement, displeasure—if she could be displeased with him.

"You try me sadly by your equivoques and contradictions," she said. "This is no light matter to either of us—not a fit subject for jesting. If you mean to tell me any thing, tell me all—the exact truth with regard to your relations with Miss Hartley."

"With the utmost pleasure! There is nothing I care to conceal from you in the whole affair. I have known Miriam Hartley well—intimately—for three months, and in that time have learned to love her with heart, soul, and strength; to hold her as the dearest, most precious of earthly blessings. God willing, I shall ask her to be my wife—*mine*, Neale Thorne's! not to become the Pastoress and slave-general of the Grand-street church, or any other of which I may hereafter have the charge; the sun and joy of my home—not a burning and a shining light to my congregation. She esteems me as a friend; she confides in me as a brother; sometimes I dare to hope that I may teach her to look upon me as something nearer and dearer than either of these—but of this I may not, cannot speak until I have some word of assurance from her own lips."

A spasm of pain wrung Gertrude's features. This brother

was *her* chief earthly treasure, and it would cost her a sharp struggle to resign the highest place in his heart to any one. It was like the bitterness of death, to see him throw away the happiness of his life, all the fulness and freshness of his best affections, through a mistaken fancy; rashly to enter into a contract that would seal a covenant with wretchedness and despair.

"Three months!" she murmured, clasping her hands imploringly. "Oh, brother! it is a short, short time, in which to decide so momentous a question as this!"

"In ordinary cases it would be, undoubtedly. I have had extraordinary advantages for studying Miriam's disposition and character. If she objects to the brevity of our acquaintance, she shall have whatever time she desires for deliberation and inquiry. I am afraid that I may prove to be an exacting lover, but I do not believe that I shall be an ungenerous one."

"Unhappily, there is little hope that she will be assailed by the scruples that would occur to any right-minded, truly modest girl, if called upon to surrender her heart and person into the keeping of a comparative stranger," said Gertrude, hastily.

It was an unjust, imprudent retort, and she appreciated its mad folly, before she ventured to raise her eyes to her brother's face, and saw there displeasure so stern, that she involuntarily recoiled a step. She recollected the drawn, white semicircles about the mouth, that pressed the blood from his lips—the vivid fire of his eyes. She had seen them in his boyish days, and trembled at the explosion they menaced, as she did now. No outburst ensued.

"We had better walk on," he said in his gentlest tone. "Mrs. Fry will be waiting for us."

They were not far from her gate, and reached it without the exchange of another syllable. Gertrude vainly en-

deavored to act and converse as usual at tea, and throughout the weary evening. She had estranged her brother, and perhaps precipitated the very evil she sought to avert. The latter would be a great calamity, but, to her sore heart, it seemed a lighter woe than the weight of Neale's anger.

"Neale's anger!" The idea was terrible—incomprehensible! She had never had a cross word from him in her life; had been his pet, as he was hers—caressed and beloved—and, notwithstanding he was a year younger than herself, shielded and protected by him. The few battles he had fought in his school-days—and these were waged with the fury of a lion—were in defence of his sister's rights, or to avenge some insult, real or fancied, offered to her. He was quick, but not irritable; spirited, but never impatient, with those whom he loved. A quarrel—a rupture with him was a contingency she had never foreseen; yet here yawned the gulf at her feet, and he stood upon the other side, calm and stony, in wrath it seemed more hopeless to think of appeasing, because it was rooted in justice and not vindictive. The spiteful littleness of a wish or a design to punish her fault, did not find a second's entertainment in his breast. His voice was full and pleasant, in addressing her, as in talking with their hosts; but she noticed how seldom he turned to her, in consultation or inquiry, of his own free will. If Mr. or Mrs. Fry referred to her, he would follow up the appeal; but the fond, unconscious wandering of the eye in her direction, while others had his apparent attention; the bright smile, that said more than words, when one of these glances met hers; the occasional escape of a pet name, that awakened reminiscences of the old, happy days, when they were inseparable—these were gone—for how long?

She could not live and endure this alienation! and when he arose, earlier than he had done the two former evenings

she had spent here, and bade them all "Good-night," she followed him out into the porch.

"Neale!"

"Good-night, Gertrude!"

He bent to give her the kiss, without which they never parted.

She threw herself upon his bosom and sobbed out her petition—"Do not leave me in anger, brother! My heart is breaking!"

He put his arm about her, and led her to the further and darkest end of the porch, sat down, and drew her to his knee.

"I am not angry with you, dear sister—only grieved, beyond your understanding. Ask yourself, what right you had to cast a slur upon the delicacy and maidenly modesty of one whom I love, and of whom you know nothing excepting what I have told you, and you will not blame me for resenting it, at the moment, or wonder that I carry the sting in my heart now."

"I know that I was wrong! but I was suffering so keenly when I said it, that I was hardly conscious what I did. I am very sorry," said Gertrude humbly.

To the world she was a proud, collected woman, but she had a true, loving heart, and Neale possessed the secret of its entrance.

"That will do!" He laid her head upon his shoulder, and kissed her again. "We will consider it all unsaid. You and I cannot afford to quarrel, little woman! One of these fine mornings you will awake and find yourself a convert to my notions upon another subject we wot of."

Gertrude was mute, but to the blissful quiet of reconciliation there succeeded a burning, restless discontent, that needed very little draught to kindle it into personal dislike of the innocent cause of her recent unhappiness. How could

she let Neale go, believing, as he was disposed to do, that he would have her sanction of his betrothal, whenever he chose to demand it? Ought she to restrain her protest against the step he meditated? He had no other counsellor, who could dare to cross his path, although it led to ruin. In this she was honest, and moved by a sincere desire for his good, his domestic comfort, and the success of his public ministry. But how should she introduce her remonstrances, without tearing open the freshly-healed wound?

Thorne resumed presently. "I shall never tease you again to like Miss Hartley. It may be, that events will render it a matter of slight moment how you think of and feel toward her. We will not borrow trouble upon interest. She may, after all, decline the honor of being your sister-in-law, and there will be the end of *your* uneasiness."

He spoke lightly, but she felt his heart throb suddenly and hard, heard his suppressed sigh—understood the quiver of anguish that ran through him at the idea.

"You are resolved, then, upon offering yourself to her?" she said, in a low, sad voice.

"I am!"

A long pause—in which the reveries of both were crowded with painful thought. Neale suffered as much, if not more than did his sister, from the difference in their sentiments upon this vital point. Her opposition to his love was the blast which destroyed many rich hopes that would have been productive of joys to him—to Gertrude—to his chosen one. He saw, furthermore, in this sister's repugnance to the proposed alliance, a foreshadowing of what the other two would think and feel. Miriam's pride matched theirs, and even could he prevail over this, or persuade his relatives to disguise their disapproval, her sensitive, affectionate nature would infallibly penetrate the veil when she became his wife. It was a trouble, the less easily supported, or set aside, be-

cause it had confronted him so unexpectedly. Yet not once did he dream of swerving from his straight, predestined course;—not a question of Miriam's worthiness, or the suitableness of his union with her, occurred to him. Of himself, and for himself, he had chosen her, and he would marry her, if he could gain her consent, though every other creature upon earth opposed him.

"Is it a sense of honor that renders you so determined?" asked Gertrude, at last. "Do you feel that you have committed yourself?"

"I do not like that expression—but I understand the bearing of your inquiry. I have thought, once or twice, that I had succeeded in acquainting the lady of whom we have been speaking, with the nature of my feelings and intention—not by overt speech, however. But her sisterly ingenuousness, her guileless simplicity and ease in my presence, have foiled me in my efforts to ascertain this to my satisfaction. It is a subject upon which I am hardly wiser than yourself."

"It may not be too late, yet!" thought Gertrude, more hopefully. "The delay of a few days would not then be a serious inconvenience to you, or a disappointment to her?" she said, half fearfully.

"That would depend upon circumstances. I speak, of course, only of the 'inconvenience' to me. I have no conceivable right to flatter myself that she would be disappointed if the topic were never named between us. Unless I write my communication—which I do not wish to do—I may not have the opportunity I covet in a month. Should it offer itself to-morrow, I would, without hesitation, avail myself of it."

"Suppose we agree upon a compromise!" suggested Gertrude, after another interval of silent reflection. "Give me a few days, in which to accustom myself to this new idea of

a sister-in-law, and to rectify whatever there may be of error in my conception of your elect lady's character and manners, while you employ this period in a careful reconsideration of the causes that have contributed to the growth of your attachment, and its probable effect upon your life and the lives of others. If at the end of—say, ten days, you are still bent upon the course you now propose to follow, I will, whatever may be my private sentiments, offer no further opposition; nor shall Miss Hartley, or any one else, learn, from my conduct, that I was ever inimical to this scheme. I offer to do more. I will not breathe or write a word deprecatory of your choice to other members of our family; but do all in my power to promote kindly feeling between them and your—your wife!"

Thorne's impulse was to reject this singular proposition on the spot; but his sister's manner was so earnest—her tone of pleading so touching—that he paused to examine its several sections. The conditions were reasonable, he discovered—his compliance with them could do him no serious harm, and the end would be the best he could hope for, while Gertrude's feelings remained what they were now. In the interim she named, her judgment of Miriam might be completely reversed, and, should it be unchanged, the risk of infection was removed by her voluntary pledge, upon which he knew he could depend. At all events, he owed her some concession in compensation for what she had undergone this evening, on account of her love for him. True, she was in error, but the spring of her misgivings and anxieties was in her partial affection for her only brother. The generous fellow's conscience smote him at recollection of his harshness and her tears. She would do for him all and more than she required at his hands, and her years of fidelity and ceaseless kindness entitled her to ask this—as she thought—trifling exercise of self-denial.

He rehearsed, carefully and deliberately, the proposal to her, that there should be no misunderstanding, and then signified his acquiescence in its terms.

"But, I warn you, in all fairness, that you must not count upon any alteration in my purpose in ten days, or ten years," he subjoined. "The work you have assigned me—the critical study of Miss Hartley's character and actions, and a re-examination of my own heart, is, by no means, unpleasing. In effect, it is but a continuation of my favorite employment during the past month. Yet I will watch and wait, since you desire it. Now, Gerty dear, it is getting late. There is a very slight chance of my seeing, much less offering myself to any lady to-night, unless Cousin Clarice should choose the parlor for her nocturnal reading-room, as she does sometimes.

"Good night, my sweet sister! Our Father bless you, and lead us both into the right path!"

Gertrude's first act, when she was alone in her chamber, was to take Miriam's peace-offering from its vase of water, and throw it out of the window—far over into the thickest part of the shrubbery. Her last duty, before she lay down upon her pillow, was to kneel and repeat, fervently, the tenor of her brother's good-night prayer. She prayed for him with tears and heart-cries, inaudible, but agonizing in their solicitude; for herself, with mournful self-pity and many fears of future sorrows, of which the present was the harbinger.

When she had forgotten grief, actual and forboded, in slumber made profound by her late unwonted excitement, and Neale dreamed sweetly of the home of his early days, and the dear one to which his eager hopes were pointing, Miriam counted, one after another, the slow-footed hours; stretched upon the rack of suspense by Memory, Doubt, and Fear—a grim trio of torturers, that gave her no space for

sleep—while her flowers, whose every bud symbolized a hope, every blossom a petition for the love of her for whom they were gathered, hung in the tangled thicket—wet with dewy tears—doomed to perish with to-morrow's sun.

CHAPTER XVI.

COUSIN CLARICE NARRATES.

THORNE had promised to make no direct revelation of his attachment to Miss Hartley before the expiration of the prescribed time; but he was not, by this pledge, restricted to formality of intercourse with her, or more cautious reserve than he had hitherto exercised in their conversations. Accordingly, happening the next day, by some oversight on the part of that sly tactician, Cousin Clarice, to obtain a private interview with Miriam, he improved the occasion by lecturing her for her diffidence in his sister's company, enumerating her claims to popular favor and individual friendship, and the like arguments—adapted to raise a discouraged soul from the slime-pits, of which Mrs. Fry's Valley is as full as was the Vale of Siddim; and exhorting her to the practice of a cheerful independence, for the sake of her comfort and his.

He preached not wholly in vain. Mrs. Hartley—incited thereto by her cousin's "suggestion" and her own hospitable impulses, had expressed her intention of inviting Miss Thorne to dine with her brother on Monday, and Miriam offered to bear the message to her, in person, on Saturday afternoon. With Willie as an escort, she presented herself at the door where she had stood tremblingly two days before.

Mrs. Fry's sewing-room, during the warm season, was a pretty porch on the east side of the house, and here she and Miss Thorne were now sitting—a workstand between them

—plunged in one of their endless talks of old times and old friends.

"Forlorn!" exclaimed the lesser lady, at sound of the door-bell. "Who interrupts us now, I wonder!"

She peeped through the lattice-work shielding her retreat from the street and front piazza. Her ringing call nearly made Gertrude upset the table—as it pierced her ear.

"Miriam! step around this way! Here we are! What upon earth possessed you to ring like a visitor? Why didn't you come right in, as you generally do, and search the house from top to bottom, until you found me? I like the music of your tongue better than I do that brazen bell-clapper," she continued, meeting her friend upon the steps, and kissing her warmly. "By some special and marvellous Providence, you find us without company. Sit down and give me your bonnet."

Miriam declined the latter clause of the invitation, and having spoken to Miss Thorne, lifted Willie to the bench, and removed his hat. Gertrude's eyes fastened admiringly upon him. She was very fond of children, and Willie's innocent loveliness, his intelligent expression, the fragility that lent a purity and a spirituelle look to his countenance, moved and interested her heart.

"How old is he?" she asked of Miriam, more easily and cordially than she had yet addressed her.

"He will be five next month. He is small of his age, but we think he will grow faster as he gains health and strength."

Gertrude coaxed the boy to her side, and talked to him of her nephews and nieces.

"When I have finished my visit here, would you not like to go home with me and see them?" she inquired, when he had mastered their names and ages.

Willie's eyes sparkled. "Oh, very much! only—" and his

little hand was stretched toward his aunt's—"I couldn't stay away from Milly more than three days, you know, ma'am."

"I did *not* know it!" She laughed so pleasantly, that Miriam's dread of her began to dissolve, like ice before the clear shining of a genial blaze. "And why cannot you stay longer? It is a great distance away. We could hardly get there and back in three days. What is to be done in that case?"

"Then, ma'am, I reckon I had better not go. Milly could not live a week without me."

"You have never tried it yet, have you? Perhaps she would bear it better than you think."

Willie shook his curls wisely. "No, ma'am! she couldn't stand it at all, for she has told me so, often, and she never says what isn't just exactly true."

Miss Thorne had the magnanimity to believe this, and to express her belief.

"That is high and rare praise, Miss Hartley," she said, overcoming her disinclination to converse with her. "There are not many of whom it can be said with truth."

"I fear that his reports of those he loves are often unconscious exaggerations," returned Miriam—"pardonable merely because they are sincere."

"Humbug!" said Mrs. Fry, "children are the only people now-a-days, whose word is to be relied upon. I would believe that boy's simple declaration sooner than I would the affidavits of some very respectable men I know, if they were sworn to upon a pile of Bibles as high as the pyramid of Cheops. I don't suppose he ever *thought* a lie—much less told one."

Gertrude remarked that Willie's ears and blue eyes were drinking in, with avidity, all that was said, and her respect for Miriam's discretion rose when the latter proposed to

him that he should run away in quest of little Fanny and her nurse.

"Miss Fry being deemed a safer companion for Innocence than her mother," said Mrs. Fry, as the child scampered off to the playground of the infant heiress of the mansion.

"A less dangerous flatterer, certainly!" smiled Miriam. "Innocence is not incompatible with vanity."

Miss Thorne purposely and skilfully introduced themes that would have been without charm to a thoughtless, unintellectual girl; and Mrs. Fry, whose wits were none of the dullest, was willing to assist in the task of drawing Miriam out; revealing, so far as a seemingly casual conversation could, the wealth of her mental resources. She was well pleased with her favorite's success under trial. She was tranquil, uniform, sensible—with less fire than was usual with her in discussion; but this was not a defect in Gertrude's sight, and even her fastidious notions could not be offended by the ladylike demeanor of her future sister. For Mrs. Fry was that much of a prophetess, and her pride and delight in the discovery were so exuberant, that her husband added line to line, and precept to precept, daily, to prevent her from giving the evident destiny of the lovers a friendly lift toward fulfilment.

Miss Thorne's constant although guarded inquiries concerning Miriam, during the first two days of her stay in Limestone; her abstracted pensiveness, on the evening of the call at Dr. Stanton's; the prolonged conference with her brother that night, and her profound silence on the subject, since, had told the story to the bright eyes and sharp intellect, as effectually as if she had been admitted to the counsels of the interested parties. It was cruel in Hugh to forbid her eulogizing Miriam to her former schoolmate; very hard to speak cautious words of faint praise, when her

warm heart was bubbling over with affectionate encomiums and stories, illustrative of Miriam's noble traits, that would assuredly win Gertrude's approbation and love. But her promise fettered her, and what recommendation she gave Neale's beloved must be in actions, not words. By these, she had already contrived to inform Gertrude that Miriam's place in her esteem was higher than that of any other girl in the county, and that she heartily favored the intimacy between her and Mr. Thorne. The encouragement her eye and voice now lent to her young friend was not unperceived by the third person of the group. Gertrude's calm orbs saw as distinctly and as far, as did the flashing, dancing black eyes, and her deductions from their observations were as decided, although not so frankly avowed as were Mrs. Fry's opinions.

She intended to judge Miriam impartially, and deluded herself into the conviction that she did no more, when she measured every remark by her rule of right taste; rang every sentiment in search of alloy. She could not deny that "the hoyden" could be dignified when occasion required, and that while she might be eccentric, she was not untaught —still, she was not reconciled to the thought of her marriage with her brother. Miss Thorne had been lauded as a model daughter, a model sister and a model woman, until she had fallen into the habit of rating herself according to the reputation accorded to her by others. In the circle of her kinspeople, her word was law; her arbitrament infallible and final, and she had always looked forward with confident pleasure, to a position as second conscience to Neale's wife. This she, nor any other woman, could ever be to the girl then before her. There was too much character there—granite where she would have had wax—rock, that might melt before the fervid glow of one mighty overmastering passion, but never at such influences as she could bring to

bear upon it. Superexcellent Gertrude may have been—as mortal excellence goes—but the fact that there was a tolerable spice of our old human nature in her making-up, was evidenced by the intrusion of selfish considerations into the test she professed to apply for her brother's sake alone.

Miriam, also, had her undercurrent of thought and conclusions. She was not at ease with Miss Thorne, and doubted whether she ever would be; but she had ceased to fear her, and saw that she herself was no longer despised. She had advanced one step nearer the love she longed to win, and felt more hopeful of ultimate victory. It was wonderful how the feeling she named friendship for the brother softened and humbled her toward the sister. She sat there, composed, undemonstrative, commanding her looks and words to express whatever she willed; but the heart was reaching, yearning, praying for permission to crawl to the feet of the stately woman, who questioned her with courteous authority, and scanned her every motion with cool intentness, that argued a motive and a purpose in her scrutiny—and all because there was that in the interlocutor's name, gestures, and visage, that reminded her of the relationship she bore to Neale Thorne. How often young, timid, loving hearts have thus striven and yearned—how lowly and modest have been their requirements, and how coldly and unpityingly they have been thrust aside from the bosoms on which they pined to rest—let the dreary catalogue of unloved and detested daughters and sisters-in-law testify.

The talk of the three ladies was interrupted by Willie's return.

"Fanny has gone to play with Susie Todd, Sally says," he said to Miriam. "I have been walking about in the garden, and looking at the flowers. There are some beauties there, and one most splendid one, Milly, that I am not acquainted with."

"And you wish me to introduce you, do you?" answered Miriam, smiling at the oddity of the phrase in a child's mouth. "We will pay a visit to the stranger, if these ladies will excuse me for a short time."

"Isn't that just like her?" Mrs. Fry was betrayed into saying, when the two were out of hearing. "She is always ready to sacrifice her convenience or pleasure to gratify her friends."

Her companion politely refrained from speaking her thought, viz.: that the sacrifice in this instance was too insignificant to merit the name.

Miriam would not have disputed this verdict. It was not a cross to be led by Willie down the walks bordered with gay autumn flowers, and inspect, with the eye of an amateur and connoisseur, the richly-stocked parterres, for which Mrs. Fry was famed. It never occurred to her that she was entitled to any credit whatever, for following out her inclination to please her boy and herself.

Willie's incognito was a flourishing stalk of the gladiolus, then rare in that neighborhood; but Miriam knew the name, and sympathized in the raptures of the little florist over its gorgeous dyes. There were other plants and blossoms to be exhibited, and she yielded to the gentle pull upon her hand, to go this way and that; to smell here, and examine there. The child's love of the beautiful was so intense, and the enjoyment he derived from its gratification so lively, that she could not bring herself to check his ecstasies.

"See, Milly! what a queer bunch of flowers, growing upon that bush!" he cried, pointing to a syringa, three months past its time of blooming. "Let us go nearer, and look at it!"

"They are dead blossoms, my dear, and never grew there," replied Miriam, raising herself on tiptoe to pull them down.

The September sun was hot; the bough had been exposed to its full power all day, and the bouquet rustled and broke as it fell to the ground. She knew it at a glance, dry and blackened as were petal and leaf. There were the slender lily-bud in the centre, the heliotropes that encircled it, the Cape jessamine and mignonette, citronaloes, geraniums, and the fringe of feathery heather, and the one thing unchanged by the fierce heat—the narrow ribbon, with the pearled edge, binding the stems together. Kept in water and shade, tended as their beauty and sweetness deserved, they would have lived for days. They were neglected—perhaps scorned—*could* it be that they were flung away, with their fragrance and freshness still upon them? A glance at Miss Thorne's window and the branch where the flowers had lodged, satisfied her that their loss was not accidental. Mrs. Fry's domestics were trained never to meddle with her flowers; never to remove a bouquet, however faded, unless ordered to do so. She protected her floral protegés as she did her child. Aware of this, Miriam did not doubt whose hand had tossed her gift out of sight, and we can scarcely deem that a morbid sensitiveness, which arrived so near to the truth, in its construction of the motives actuating the deed.

"Poor flowers!" said Willie, in tender compassion, seeing in his aunt's countenance the tokens of emotion. "I am sorry they were burned to death—aren't you?"

"Yes, darling! We will put them out of sight somewhere, and not talk about them any more."

At the corner of the square stood a globular clump of box, hollow in the centre, where the branches had died, for want of light and air—a dark, rank-smelling cavity—and this Miriam chose for the tomb of her rejected offering. She whispered something, in dropping it in. Was it a prophecy, founded upon just reasoning, or the causeless despair of youth's transition from hope to sorrow?

"She will never love me!" she said, stoically; then, "We must go home now, Willie; I cannot stay here any longer!"

Monday brought fair weather and Mrs. Hartley's expected guests. The kind hostess had consulted her boarder's wishes in inviting no one besides his sister and the Frys. The ladies came a little after noon, and spent two hours in quiet chat and needlework, before the gentlemen joined them. Mr. Thorne was the first of the sterner sex who appeared. It was Black Monday, and he had a right to abridge the forenoon of study by an hour or so. There was no one in the parlor, but the hum of voices issued from the inner room, where were Gertrude and Cousin Clarice.

Mrs. Fry had complained of a headache, and gone to lie down, taking Miriam along with her, "to talk away the pain." It is likely that she did experience some pain in the region of the cranium, since she said so; but she was suffering fully as much for the want of an untrammelled chat with her friend. Gertrude was a pleasant and acceptable visitor, and she loved her very truly; "but somehow—I know it is a shame to say it, yet I can't help thinking it—all single women—the best and most sensible of them—as they near the thirties, seem to adopt the maxim Beau Brummel left written upon a slip of paper, when he had to flee the country, 'Starch is the man!' She who is prudent at twenty-five, in five years more becomes a prude, unless she gets a husband in the mean time. It is as if Mother Nature soused them in her starch-bowl every season. Gertrude has had a dip more than I would have advised. I do hope, devoutly, that she does not mean to be an old maid. There's nothing like marrying, for taking the stiffness out. Don't look solemn! I am not going to say another word of disparagement. She is a fine girl, and I like her prodigiously, and even you and I have our faults, Miriam."

"One or two apiece!" answered Miriam. "Now let me unbind your hair and rub your head. I will have it all ready again, before the dinner-bell rings."

The little woman's friendship was a great solace, in this day of doubt and discouragement; and it was more in consonance with her mood to hold the restless, ringleted head upon her lap, and, while she stroked it, listen and reply, as she liked, to her rhodomontades, than to stitch fine linen, that tired her eyes, and hearken to fine speeches, that tired her ears, as she had been doing below. Her share of talking was hardly a remove from taciturnity. She had ceased to hope to commend herself to Miss Thorne's favor, since she had discovered, or thought she had discovered, that her case was prejudged. Against indifference, or an unfavorable prepossession, she would have contended: she was too proud to wrestle with unreasoning dislike—unprovoked hatred.

Cousin Clarice was the heroine of the day. Bland, sprightly, assiduous in hospitable attentions, she appeared, to Miss Thorne, a lively and grateful contrast to Miriam's unnatural gravity and sententious observations. Mrs. Hartley was an old-fashioned housekeeper—one of those who cannot content themselves to attend the summons to dinner, seated in the parlor, gloves on and face decked in holiday gayety, overcast by no fear of possible misadventure in the spreading of the feast. She must leave the company in charge of her daughter, or some other lady-relative, and slip away to the dining-room, while the table was being set. Gertrude's entertainment being thrown entirely upon Cousin Clarice, she invited her into her uncle's study, to look at some family portraits. They had just reached George Stanton's, as Neale came up behind them.

"The noblest of them all!" said Cousin Clarice, plaintively, folding her fingers, nun-like, upon her bosom. "But he

was far more beautiful than that. I beg my uncle continually, to turn that face to the wall. It is almost a caricature, there being just enough likeness to the original to sadden those who loved him."

"Ah!" said Gertrude, who had never heard the history of the disappointment. She passed to the next. "What a handsome youth!"

"As a boy he *was* handsome," replied Cousin Clarice. "He changed grievously afterward, although many admired him to the last—poor fellow! It is my cousin Henry Hartley—Willie's father. My uncle does not like the picture, and would have banished it to the garret long ago, but for Mrs. Hartley's entreaties. It reminds her of her lost child, although there is little resemblance in reality—"

Gertrude started at her brother's touch upon her cheek, gave him a smiling welcome, and returned to the pictures.

"Who is the lady next to him—his wife?"

"Oh, no! a portrait of my cousin Edith—Mrs. Hartley—taken about the time of her marriage. Henry's wife was never painted—at least, never after she married him; and if there were a likeness of her extant, I doubt whether any of the family, excepting Miriam, would be in favor of admitting it to this collection. Not that our connections were ever unkind to her—for she died in the room overhead, tended as if she had been my cousin's own daughter—but there was so much of mortification and sorrow associated with Henry's union with her, that the subject is a painful one to his friends. She was a pretty, showy girl, clever and accomplished, and, as the sequel proved, not devoid of sensibility. She never rallied from the shock of her husband's death and her brother's disgrace. You have heard the tragedy of our homestead, Mr. Thorne?"

"I do not recollect it, madam," he rejoined, dryly, to avert, if practicable, the impending revelation.

Cousin Clarice believed that she had a genius for narrative, and in prolixity and circumstantiality she rivalled Schehezerade. Nothing that related, however remotely, to the Hartley family, was uninteresting to Thorne; but his sense of honor was too fine to lead him to pry into what they had not chosen to reveal to him. He had not the right to check Miss Stanton, while she ostentatiously identified herself with the household; nor did Gertrude once imagine that there was any breach of taste, still less of propriety, in listening to whatever she saw fit to recount.

She followed Cousin Clarice's example, then, in seating herself upon the sofa, under Henry Hartley's portrait, and took up her work, assuming the attitude of a listener. Neale walked to the window, and did not turn or speak while the story went on.

"When my cousin Henry was about nineteen years of age, there removed to this neighborhood a family by the name of Bent, consisting of an elderly maiden lady and her two adopted children, a nephew and niece. These young people speedily became intimate with Henry and Miriam, being lively and attractive, and residing upon a farm contiguous to my uncle's plantation. Miriam was then a girl of fourteen—too youthful to be in serious danger from the ill-advised association that eventually wrecked her brother's prospects of respectability and usefulness. William and Amelia Bent spent as much time here as in their own home, and ingratiated themselves as effectually with Dr. Stanton and Mrs. Hartley as with their children.

"An incident, that happened a year after their settlement in this vicinity, served to open the eyes of their elders to the results of the imprudent intercourse, while it strengthened the bond between Henry and William, and exposed the real character of the sentiment which existed between the former and Amelia. Henry saved William Bent from

drowning in the river, a flaw of wind having upset the boat in which they were sailing. Young Bent was attacked with the cramp, as he was swimming toward the shore, and was senseless when his companion succeeded in dragging him to the land. A distorted rumor reached Miss Bent, while on a visit to Miriam, that Henry was lost, and her brother saved; and her agony of regret, exceeding that of the devoted mother, betrayed her secret. A mutual explanation ensued, and Henry declared to his grandfather and mother his intention of marrying without delay. The principal objection raised was his youth. It appeared strange, in the light of after-days, that so few inquiries were made by Dr. Stanton concerning the previous history of the Bents, and that William Bent's habits of secret dissipation were not then suspected by his nearest friends. Mrs. Hartley is indulgent to excess with her children, and Henry's arguments and persuasions won the day. He was already inclined to be wild and irregular in his habits, and my dear uncle fondly hoped that his marriage would rectify these disorders. But it seemed to hurry him downward, instead of leading him into right paths."

"How often is that the case, in ill-assorted marriages!" sighed Gertrude.

"Too often, indeed!" assented the narrator, pathetically. "My poor cousin grew more recklessly dissipated, but I shall ever believe, with his mother, that it was less his fault than his weakness and the effect of evil companionship. William Bent sustained a fairer character outwardly than his comrade, but the more discerning among Henry's friends more than suspected him to be the greater sinner of the two —the tempter, whose superior address enabled him to evade the consequences of his misdeeds, while Henry scorned concealment; met his punishment, face to face, and tried to brave it out.

"Willie was a babe, a few months old, when a fearful report obtained circulation in Limestone. The Bents, so said a Northern traveller, had left their native state, to rid themselves of the obloquy attached to the family by the infamy of certain of the older members. The parents of these children were separated years before, and this aunt had adopted the two as her own. Their father had even been arraigned for murder, and barely escaped the gallows through some quibble of the law. Dr. Stanton is, in his way, a proud man, and this story fell upon him with overwhelming force. He demanded its truth of his grandson, and a violent quarrel followed. William Bent chanced to be at home from college, at this inauspicious epoch, and called here while Dr. Stanton was talking with Henry. What part he took in the debate was never known; but the young men parted in anger from the elder, and from that day Bent never, of his own accord, visited this house. He seemed a changed and fallen man; avoided his old acquaintances, and seldom appeared in public. But there was an index to his increasing degradation, and that was the rapid ruin of his brother-in-law. They were more intimate than ever. The best trait in the betrayer's character was his attachment to the friend he had helped to destroy—a touch of gratitude to the preserver of his life. Happy would it have been for them and all connected with them, if they had both found then a watery grave!

"At length Henry's embarrassments could be no longer concealed, and he was compelled to appeal to his grandfather to rescue him from the grasp of the law. His mother had supplied him privately with funds, until she was nearly impoverished. My poor cousin! I well remember my unmingled pity and indignation, at seeing her plain, well-worn dresses, and Mrs. Henry Hartley's extravagant toilette. There is no question that Henry was urged on by young

Bent, to make the application to his grandfather, which terminated in a final rupture. Henry left his home the next day, and never returned. His wife professed to be ignorant of the cause of his flight and his destination. William Bent was silent and sullen. Henry had been absent a month, when upon a certain court-day, in which play had run high, William made several ineffectual attempts to borrow money, and at last went home; brought out his riding-horse—a fine hunter he apparently esteemed very highly—rode him into town and sold him at public auction, for little more than half his value. His manner was excited—his look that of a man bent upon desperate deeds. The last person with whom he was seen to converse, on that afternoon, was a notorious itinerant gambler, and they evidently separated upon ill terms.

"That night"—Cousin Clarice's voice took a more tragic, a deeper key—"my uncle's study was entered forcibly—"

"This room?" interrupted Gertrude.

"No—a smaller apartment, on the other side of the house. The lock of his desk was broken, and the robber had already abstracted a portion of the money and some valuable papers, therein contained, when my uncle, having heard an unusual noise, came softly down-stairs, and bravely, but imprudently—for he was unarmed—laid hold of the intruder and shouted for help. Strange to say, no one heard him but Miriam. She went directly to his room; found a candle burning, but no one there. She knew where he kept his pistols. He had not thought to take them, never dreaming of a robbery. Miriam seized one, and ran down to the study. The thief and assassin had succeeded in choking the dear old gentleman, until he loosed his grasp, and then struck him, with the stock of a pistol, to the floor. Miriam saw the blow—the fall—and that her grandfather lay stunned or dead. Prudence would have dictated her immediate flight

—since the robber had done his worst, and she could not, by her injudicious interference, restore senses or life. If she had given the alarm, the fellow would have been frightened away as surely as by other and extreme measures, and few women would have thought of standing their ground, in the circumstances. But the blood of the Hartleys is hot; their passions fiery and uncontrollable; then, too, the reckless girl was a child in years—only sixteen—and accustomed to obey whatever impulse presented itself. She raised her pistol and fired with so true an aim, that the ball pierced the cap of the robber, and carried it off his head. She only saw that his face was blackened, and further concealed by a bandanna handkerchief tied over his mouth; for, uttering something between a groan and an oath, he escaped precipitately through the open window by which he had effected an entrance."

"Miss Hartley incurred a frightful risk," remarked Gertrude.

"Did she not? Had I been in her place, I should have been overcome by remorse for my hasty act, and thankfulness for my deliverance from the sin of murder and the vengeance of the thief."

"And was she not agitated by these considerations?"

"Not that we ever knew. She has masculine nerves, and she was the calmest of the group which soon gathered about my poor uncle. It was many hours before he was thoroughly rational again; but other evidence than his served to fix upon William Bent the suspicion of having attempted the double crime of robbery and assassination. The cap dropped by the disguised man was identified as his, both by its general appearance, and by initials written upon the lining. These, although partially effaced, were deciphered, to the satisfaction of all, to be 'W. H. B.' When search was made for Bent, he was not at home, and

neither his aunt or sister knew any thing of his whereabouts. He returned the following day, having been, as he stated, to F—— 'upon business.' His horse and buggy bore marks of a long and hard drive, and his own aspect was wild and disordered. He was arrested and examined. The testimony against him was very clear. Dr. Wharton, one of our Limestone physicians, was returning from a visit to a patient, late on the night of the robbery, and met two men, driving furiously out of town. He was positive that the carriage and horse were young Bent's—or, rather, his aunt's—but did not recognize the occupants. Miss Bent and Mrs. Henry Hartley agreed in declaring that William took tea as usual with the family, that evening—complained of headache, seemed greatly depressed in spirits, and retired at an early hour. His chamber was in a wing of the building remote from the apartments occupied by the two ladies; and they were compelled to admit that they heard and knew nothing of his movements, from the time of their separation at night, until breakfast-time next morning, when the servant sent to call him brought back the intelligence that he was not in his room.

"Inquiries were instituted for the gambler, who was—it was asserted by those conversant with such iniquitous proceedings, Bent's creditor—but he was not to be found; nor has he, from that day to this, ever showed his face here. There remained no doubt upon the minds of all candid, impartial judges, that the two were accomplices in the burglary, and had fled in company—Bent having transferred the booty to his comrade, returning to prevent suspicion of his share in the deed. The guilty man would inevitably have been committed for further trial, had not Dr. Stanton and Miriam taken such a resolute stand in his defence. I have heard that it was a mournful, touching sight—that of the venerable sufferer, just risen from his bed, his wounded head

bandaged, giving in his evidence, with such earnestness, such energy of tone and language, that one might have imagined him pleading for the life of a beloved son. He vouched, in the strongest terms, for William Bent's general good character, and expressed his solemn conviction of his innocence of the accusation brought against him. He had not clearly distinguished the robber's features, he said, but the man had spoken, as he seized him, and the voice was not William Bent's. On being asked whether he knew it—whether he thought that it belonged to any one with whom he was acquainted, he replied, that whatever might be his fancies upon this point, he would not divulge them. No man should be condemned upon an imagination of his. But he *was* certain that the voice was natural, and was not at all like that of the prisoner; furthermore, that the real criminal had black hair, while Bent's was light—almost sandy, and perfectly straight, whereas the robber's was curly."

"He may have worn a wig," said Gertrude, fully accepting the *raconteur's* judgment of the person arraigned.

"Certainly! What was more easy than to assume a false tone and cover his hair? Miriam's account of the occurrence was wonderfully collected and confident in one of her age and sex—not to mention other reasons, that would have operated powerfully on the mind of a weaker woman."

A meaning glance, which the brother did not see, pointed this remark for the sister.

"The robber was taller than Bent, by several inches, she affirmed, and corroborated her grandfather's account of the difference in the color of their hair. Her evidence only varied from his in her emphatic declaration that she had not recognized the fellow, and had no suspicions as to his identity.

"Upon such flimsy rebutting testimony as this, the prisoner was acquitted—or, to speak more truly, because of Dr.

Stanton's manifest dread of his conviction. As the wise jury argued, if the parties most injured were determined to overlook the offence, and pardon the offender, the public were not called upon to insist upon the administration of justice."

"A dangerous conclusion!" commented Miss Thorne, severely. "One subversive of the most sacred interests of society!"

"Undoubtedly! But here, in Kentucky, law is oftentimes loosely executed. My dear, noble uncle's sympathies, or Christian forgiveness, carried him further yet. He shook Bent's hand heartily, in the sight of all assembled, when he was discharged; congratulated him, with tears in his eyes, upon his 'honorable acquittal;' took him in his carriage and brought him home; in short, spared no pains to convince him and everybody else of his belief in the young man's integrity.

"Other troubles soon followed, to bury the memory of this adventure. Poor Henry's untimely death, and the decease of his unhappy wife. Ah, here are our deserters! My dear Fanny, I hope your headache is very much better!"

Neale turned, bowed, and spoke, but did not quit his post by the window. He remembered the look of grave appeal with which one had once said, standing on that very spot—"You would do battle for the preservation of your own life—what if the hand of the murderer were raised against one whom you loved better than yourself?" Then, in reply to his base, unworthy suspicion that she doubted his courage—"Some day I will try and tell you why I spoke as I did."

"*Try* and tell you!" It would be a grievous effort to her to recount the tragedy that had flowed so glibly from her cousin's tongue. Unfeminine, "reckless," as she was reported to be by this exemplary exponent of womanly feeling, the brave heart that had steadied her arm to defend her

grandparent, shrank and quivered at the recollection of the scene and deed.

Miss Thorne worked away diligently with her crochet-needle and fine thread, and drew, with every loop, more strongly and closely, the network of prejudice and principle that barred Miriam from her affection. This fiery, ungentle Amazon, attacking, with murderous intent, strange men, at midnight, when a scream, or even an hysterical sigh, would have answered her purpose as well—this unblushing witness, testifying in the face of an excited, gaping crowd, to the innocence of a dissipated lover—for Gertrude's intuition discovered what Cousin Clarice designed to insinuate—this queer, wild, ungoverned and ungovernable girl, was not the wife for a clergyman, and that clergyman her brother! What did *he* think of this tale? Was his infatuation so hopeless that he still desired to mingle the strained purity of the Thorne blood with the hot, dark tide that coursed in the Hartley veins?

She stole a glance at him. He leaned against the window-frame, arms folded, and head slightly bowed, his lips relaxed into unbent lines that were almost a smile, warm coloring in his cheek—light, soft, yet ardent, in the eyes, gleaming beneath the golden-brown lashes—too long and thick for any but woman's eyes. Not to her loving sight alone were the lineaments—ordinarily pale and firm—clothed, for the moment, with actual beauty. Miriam's, Mrs. Fry's, Cousin Clarice's regards wandered to him by turns, and all noted what none dared remark upon to one another.

"Grand, faithful, loving heart! Oh, my empress! my darling! *Mine* she shall be!"

And looking up, as he let his hand drop upon the ledge of the casement, in the energy of his unuttered resolve, his eyes, brimming with pride and tenderness, fell directly upon Miriam's. She had arisen to get Mrs. Fry's work-basket

from a table near by, and confronted him, while her face was hidden from the rest. Arrested by the intensity of meaning in his gaze, she paused, oblivious of the presence of others—first bewildered, then intoxicated by the flood of strange emotions that rushed over her. The look—its reception and comprehension, were the work of a second. Cousin Clarice, and probably Gertrude Thorne, saw her hesitation, and the crimson of ear and neck, that answered the eager, searching flash, but neither gave the scene its full interpretation. When Neale advanced a step, and aided in gathering the contents of the basket, thrown out by a convulsive start of the hand that now tremblingly replaced them, the movement seemed courteous, rather than lover-like.

His low "Let me help you!" was gentle and pleasant to hear, as were all the milder cadences of his deep voice. There was nothing particularly noteworthy in gesture or intonation, naught to indicate that he had, unconsciously to himself, broken his promise to his sister—that he had told his love to its object, as distinctly and fervently as in articulate language, and the story been partially apprehended.

CHAPTER XVII.

SUMMER PERSIMMONS.

"GERTRUDE! did you ever taste a persimmon in September?"

"I do not know that I ever did. Why do you ask?"

"It is a beautiful fruit at that season—not unlike a Siberian crab-apple; yellow and carmine; plump and glossy. But the astringent juices pucker the tongue, roughly, smartly, tinglingly. He is a foolish man who judges of the mature fruit by this crude specimen. There is not a drop of that acrid juice but will be a grain of sugar by Christmas. The hard, tough pulp will be tender to melting; sweet to lusciousness, when the mellowing frosts have fallen upon it. 'Sweet are the uses of adversity!'"

"Your figure is an unfortunate one!" returned Gertrude, coldly. "If I were a man, I should not relish the idea that a marriage with me would be the needful frost and winter for the perfection of a tart character."

"What a terrific jump at an application!" said Thorne, with mock astonishment. "Who spoke of marriage? Our talk was of persimmons."

"Whatever may be your talk, your thoughts are always of one person," rejoined the sister, mournfully.

"Especially when they are led in that direction by the dexterous allusions of kind friends!"

Thorne smiled—not sneered—yet Gertrude's face was stained by a conscious blush. They were rambling in Mrs.

Fry's garden in expectation of the arrival of other guests, and Miss Thorne had contrived, as she fancied, in a very happy, off-hand way, to introduce the subject of the story they had heard, the day before, and with its discussion had slipped in various general and covert hints relative to Miriam's antecedents, and the perilous nature of the family characteristics. Her dreads and dislikes, upon this subject, were becoming absolutely monomaniacal. How much Cousin Clarice had contributed to the germination and ripening of these, Gertrude was not aware. With all her failings, she was a good and upright woman, persuaded, in her own mind, of the rectitude of her intentions; and as such, incapable of tracing the labyrinthine course of Miss Stanton's motives and ends. Gertrude believed in her professed attachment to her young cousin, and the honesty of her excuses for Miriam's "eccentricities," that yet served to make these more obvious and glaring.

It was not surprising that the two ladies had already talked so much upon this theme, from which Miss Thorne's good taste would have warned her, had her feelings been less deeply interested. It was for her brother's good—she pleaded, to the occasional misgivings of conscience, as to the honorable propriety of this prying into the secret faults of one who was sometimes her kind entertainer—always the dear and close friend of her hostess. It could not be wrong to listen to what so refined and affectionate a being as Cousin Clarice revealed. There was nothing very tangible in these divulgations. Faults and foibles were seldom actually charged home upon the dear relative Cousin Clarice was trying to slaughter. With that cunning trip-hammer in miniature, her tongue, she beat out the grains of inferior metal, she extracted from a character, otherwise pure and true, into thin, specious foil, that enveloped the whole. If the little spinster were an adept in making and mending matches, she

was as expert in marring those that did not meet her approbation. Had Neale surmised the extent of the influence she had acquired over his sister, or, indeed, the ineradicable malignity of the woman he despised, he would have dragged the plot to the light of day—laid bare falsehoods and strangled inuendoes—taught the wily schemer that he was to be feared, and by virtue of that fear his dearest rights be respected. But it was all underground work, and into the subtleties of such operations, he was constitutionally incapacitated from initiation. Gertrude was an indifferent diplomatist. He could read her designs, and reply to them, in amusement—not in anger.

He enjoyed her confusion, a while, before he proceeded:

"We are both thinking of the same person, Gerty, but not with kindred feelings. I have never pretended to you that she was faultless. I do assert, however, that her failings are only such as Time, and fuller experiences of Life—new affections, and perhaps in GOD's own time and way—Sorrow will ripen into virtues. The heart is sound, and what you mistake for incurable tartness and bitterness, is simply immaturity. Natures like hers do not develop, in all their richness, in girl-life."

Gertrude shook her head. "It is a hazardous experiment—this marrying a woman to train her! Why—to use your metaphor—take the unripe fruit, when you can as easily get other, perfect and well-flavored?"

"More easily, I doubt not," said Neale, saucily. "Figs, nectarines, bananas—soft, sweet, and ready to fall at a touch, whoever may reach after them. No, I thank you! I had rather fence in my wild persimmon, and sit me down at its foot, to watch, in patience and confidence, its day of maturity. As to flavor—I like piquancy, and I shall have it—if she will have me!"

Gertrude made a petulant movement. She dared not re-

iterate the uncharitable retort, so promptly punished on a former occasion, but she was sorely tempted.

Neale was in a sunny humor, and he loved to teaze.

"While we speak of fruits—shall I tell you of what your friend Cousin Clarice reminds me? Of nothing so much as a species of dwarf plum, a pretty red sloe, very juicy and very sweet—too sweet, in fact, upon the surface, but the heart is a stone, wrapped up in bitterness. She leaves a horribly bad taste in my mouth."

"Such is prejudice!" thought Gertrude, despairingly. "You hardly do her justice, brother. She appears to me to be a most estimable lady. I know that she has an exalted opinion of your character and talents, and Miss Hartley has no truer friend."

"Then, she of all people living, should pray to be delivered from her friends!"

"Why should Miss Stanton dislike her, Neale? Be reasonable! Or—" added Gertrude, hypothetically, "if we allow your view of the case—that there does exist an aversion on the part of the elder to the younger lady, is it fair to ascribe all the blame of the disagreement to the former?"

"Well put, my pretty Socrates! Let me ask a question in return. If there does exist an active antagonism between the Spirit of Evil, and the righteous soul, here upon earth, is it charitable for us to presume that the fault is more in the Prince of darkness, than in the goodness that enrages him, by resisting his attacks?"

"I have nothing more to say!"

Gertrude walked toward the house, her brother following—laughing.

"Come, my dear Dignity! So long as I do not judge you by the company you keep, what matter my criticisms of your 'estimable' acquaintance? Candidly—my comparison

was exaggerated. While Cousin Clarice *does* yield more frequently to Satanic influences than I could wish—"

They were passing a clump of shrubbery, filling up the angle formed by two cross-walks, and here, at the very point of intersection, they were met by her whose name seemed, to Gertrude's startled faculties, yet echoing in the air. She was glad that Neale was unabashed, and by his coolness, covered her fluttered reception of Cousin Clarice's elaborate salutations. There was the faintest hue of red in the sallow cheek of the latter, but it may have arisen from the suddenness of their meeting, which was, as she said, very nearly a collision, or from the warmth of the afternoon. She felt the unusual glow, for she passed her handkerchief over her brow, as she told how debilitating she found these unseasonably hot days. Dr. Stanton was away from home, as usual, when he was invited out—she went on to relate—during their promenade. Should he return in season, Mrs. Hartley could drop in with him, after supper.

"Miriam is in the parlor; while I, led by the double temptation of Mrs. Fry's unsurpassed collection of floral beauties, and the prospect of joining you in your ramble among them, asked leave to stroll in this direction. Have you seen those superb yellow dahlias—the very 'likeness of a kingly crown,' Mr. Thorne? Not noticed them particularly? Oh, shame! My dear Miss Thorne, cannot we inspire him with a love for the *truly* beautiful?"

Very fine, very amiable, very artless! Yet, somehow, Neale felt disposed to strengthen instead of modify the figure of speech which had given offence to his sister.

Miriam's form occupied the centre of the bay window of the drawing-room, and upon her knee was Fanny Fry, No. 2, a winsome, vivacious child of three, chattering with all her little might. Her listener was laughing merrily at one of the precocious maiden's sallies; and, instead of putting her

down upon the floor, and sobering her face to the prescribed degree of pleased gravity at sight of the additions to the group, she held out her hand to Miss Thorne, still half-laughing, with an apology for not rising. She returned Neale's greeting by a gentle inclination of the head, and a more serious expression, not unmixed with shyness, while a deeper color settled where the dimples had been.

The infallible "young woman's guide," from whose wise regulations I quoted somewhat at length in Chapter XI., once said to me: "Never take a baby into your arms, or caress it, in the presence of gentlemen. It does not look well, and is apt to give rise to remarks."

"What kind of remarks? What imaginable harm can there be in an action so natural and innocent?"

"That may be so, my dear; but men are wicked creatures, and they are sure to think it is done for effect. Forward and underbred girls are fond of producing a sensation in this way, and some are silly enough to fancy they recommend themselves by their extravagant demonstrations over the 'sweet little cherubs.' It is in wretched taste—quite improper!"

Gertrude Thorne was too sensible to acquiesce fully in this dogma; but it was morally impossible for her to judge fairly of any thing which Miriam did. She had no earthly reason for charging her with affectation, yet she would fain have persuaded herself that Fanny had been summoned to the parlor for the purpose of completing a tableau that might attract Neale's eye. Cousin Clarice tripped up to her cousin, and adjusted stealthily the skirt which Fanny's gambols had twitched back from Miriam's foot. Thorne had a quiet smile of contempt for the squeamish officiousness, that saw any thing amiss in the exposure of the well-shaped member, in its pure white stocking, and dainty, rosetted slipper. Gertrude commended the tact and delicacy of Cousin Clarice, and secretly accused Miriam of petty co-

quetry and ridiculous folly, in resorting to such hackneyed tricks of display and fascination.

"I have brought a letter from the office for you," said Thorne to Miriam.

As he gave it to her, he transferred Fanny to his knee, and talked with her, while Miriam, having asked leave of the company, ran over the epistle.

"It is a joint petition from Max and Louisa," she said to Mrs. Fry, "praying me to occupy my appointed place on Thursday week. They appear so much in earnest, that I am at a loss in what terms to convey my refusal."

"It is outrageous to refuse at all!" exclaimed the bridegroom's cousin. "The most unkind and irrational thing I ever knew you to do! and only because you do not like to leave Willie! The child will be entirely comfortable and happy with your mother."

"I do not doubt it. Did I say that was my only reason?" replied Miriam, smiling.

"You can have no other, except caprice. Max will have a right to be wounded and displeased, if you fail him now, after being his best friend for years and years. I have a great mind to tell you what people are beginning to say, since the report has gotten abroad that you are not going to the wedding. Letty Lewis will have it that Max jilted you, and that you cannot face the trial of seeing him married to another. There!"

"As if I cared for that!" Miriam laughed. "If the desire to please Max and his bride cannot tempt me to go, this very plausible tale certainly will not drive me."

"And it is thus that the gossips handle the name of their pastor's future partner!" thought Gertrude, scandalized. "She is used to it too, it is clear, from her independent manner of taking it. My poor brother! will she be as careless of your reputation as of her own?"

Cousin Clarice's reply was apropos to this inaudible groan of sisterly solicitude:

"It is a shame that these reports should be circulated! Miriam dear, would it not be well to adopt such measures as would close the lips of your slanderers? Few women can afford to defy public opinion."

"But there are some whom falsehood cannot blacken!" rejoined Neale, before Miriam could speak.

In this audience, he had no scruples about avowing himself her ally and advocate. Two of the ladies—Gertrude and Mrs. Fry—were already cognizant of his feelings for her; he had pledged his support to Miriam, and the sooner Cousin Clarice recognized in him the suitor and defender of her whom she persecuted, the better.

"Oh! *you* favor her staying at home!" ejaculated the clever strategist, wheeling upon him. "I beg your pardon —I did not know!"

And she fell to knitting her "Nubia," with an air that announced the inutility of further remonstrance. Of course his will was law! This was insufferable.

Miriam's forehead was suffused with scarlet, and her eyes fell to the floor. Mrs. Fry shot an angry ray at her visitor, and bit her lip, to keep back a retort that would not have been in keeping with her character as hostess.

"I have no voice in the matter," said Thorne, carelessly. "Miss Miriam does not require to be told how sadly she will be missed by all in her home. Yet I can answer for the rest, as for myself, that no selfish preferences of ours will stand in the way of her friend Mr. Wilde's gratification, or her enjoyment."

"I will talk it over with Mamma and Grandpapa, and abide by their decision," concluded Miriam, recovering her self-command. "There is the letter, Mrs. Fry. You can read it at your leisure."

Gertrude was not content with her brother's behavior that evening. His attentions to Miss Hartley were too undisguised and assiduous. There was no other young lady in the party; and while Mr. and Mrs. Fry held Cousin Clarice and herself in conversation, she had no ostensible cause for summoning him from his post at Miriam's side. The twain looked engrossingly and provokingly happy—ensconced within the embrasure of the window, indifferent or forgetful of the neighborhood of others. Miriam had fallen into her old posture of meditation or attention. The clearly-cut lines of her profile showed strongly against the darkness of the outer night; her hands enfolded one another in her quaint, quiet fashion, and her eyes appeared to study them. Neale's face was turned from the group at the centre-table. His sister could only see that his hand grasped the back of the large stuffed chair in which Miriam sat; that he bent toward her ear, and his discourse was animated, although he guarded his voice so carefully, that its purport could not be guessed even by such jealous, involuntary eaves-dropping as hers, or Cousin Clarice's cat-like auriculars.

What were they talking about? She had his word, and he would keep the letter of it in all strictness, but there were other methods of "committing" one's self, and from what she could perceive of the progress of the interview, he had chosen one of the most fatal. She watched those slender fingers lying upon the crimson velvet of the fauteuil, with sensations akin to agony. She saw them quiver, tighten, rise and sink—Neale could not talk without gesticulation—and imagined that they telegraphed to her his approach to the precipice of unequivocal declaration. Watching, she forgot to speak in her turn, and lapsed into silence.

Cousin Clarice had engaged Mr. Fry in a literary discussion. Her trim, starched form rejected the support of the arms and back of her chair; her knitting lay, a fleecy cloud

upon the stand, and one tiny hand, nearly as white, rested amid its softness. She looked straight and intently at her fellow colloquist. What were to her the problematical love-passages going on in the recess to her right, compared with the impressive and instructive dicta of her cultivated host? So said her whole mien. She questioned deferentially, and replied *refer*entially to his superior information and judgment. She was really intelligent; her reading varied and extensive, and she succeeded in making herself thoroughly agreeable to the gentlemanly scholar.

It was but following the track of their subject, and therefore no surprise to Mr. Fry, when she called, in her thin voice, "Mr. Thorne, can I have your attention for an instant?"

"Certainly, Miss Stanton!" moving his chair to bring her within eye range.

"I have been telling Mr. Fry of a charming scrap of anonymous verse, I read a short time since. It pleased me so much that I copied it. I believe that I have it in my work-box. Let me see!" She drew forth from the cabât a neat memorandum book, and fluttered the leaves a moment. "Ah, here it is! May I beg you to read it aloud for the pleasure of the rest? Read it as appreciatingly as you did that beautiful hymn last Sabbath morning, and I am certain that my friends will enjoy it, as I did."

Neale had an honest disgust for "flummery," and Cousin Clarice's praise was, to his palate, a most objectionable variety of this compound; but he was in a kindly mood, and not inclined to deny any one a reasonable favor. Instead of disclaiming or refusing, he got up slowly, and stayed a moment, when he had arisen, to make a parting remark to Miriam.

"Do not quit this corner. I shall be back soon, unless you are weary of my subject—and me!" he said, playfully, unheard by all but her.

She looked up—a trustful, satisfied beam, and a beautiful smile passed over her features. "I am content!"

He did not ask himself—"Will I ever have from her another look and word as sweet?"

If there be an angel of presentiment, it is the most unfaithful to its trust of all the host of ministering spirits.

Neale's face and heart were full of sunshine, when he drew near the lamp, the manuscript volume in his hand. He looked over the poem before reading it aloud. Cousin Clarice's chirography was graceful and legible, and opposed no hinderance to his elocution. Not even her flattery could make this constrained or affected, and the stanzas acquired a beauty and sweetness, not all their own, from his rendering.

"THE VOICES OF THE RAIN."

One balmy day—hast thou forgot?
  All April was the weather;
And from the honeysuckled-porch
  We watched the sky together.
Through the thin, filmy veil of cloud
  The sun was mildly beaming,
And partly mist, and partly showers,
  The rain was softly streaming.
Like a blessing on the verdant plain,
Fell the gentle, gentle, silver rain.

Another time—thou wert away—
  'Twas in the month of roses—
The June, who, wooed by ardent suns,
  Her fervid heart discloses—
There came a scroll that bade prepare
  For thee a speedy greeting;
Smiling, I by the casement sat,
  With the welcome letter, beating
Time to the music 'gainst the pane,
Of the laughing, singing Summer rain.

In storm and gloom our parting came—
  That dark and wretched even!

We could but whisper brokenly,
"If not on earth—in heaven!"
At the future, stretched so dim and lone,
Our loving hearts were quailing;
Within were looked and sighed farewells—
Without, the winds were wailing
A piercing wildly-sad refrain,
To the heavy, driving Autumn rain.

What are we now? We, who then vowed
But death our souls should sever?
Within thy breast the fount of love
Is spent and dry forever—
While deep in mine the tide of woe
Forevermore is throbbing,
The blasts against my casement blow
In angry, fitful sobbing—
And my heart weeps, in tears as vain,
With the bitter, bitter Winter rain.

Cousin Clarice wiped away a tear that trickled down her pensive cheek. The sentimental was her forte. It was not Mrs. Fry's; but she thought the poem "very pretty—only *so* sad."

Her husband liked it. "It is evidently the production of a youthful—I should say, an unpractised writer. There is a redundance of adjectives, and the tone is morbid, but the rhythm is melodious; the figures happily conceived and well carried out; the feeling rising effectively to a climax. Altogether it is a promising attempt, if the poet be a new one. How is that, Miss Stanton?"

"You said it was anonymous—did you not?" inquired Gertrude, leaning on her brother's shoulder, and re-reading the verses with him.

"Perhaps 'unacknowledged' would have been the truer word," returned Cousin Clarice, smilingly. "It is a waif, brought to me by a summer zephyr." Gertrude felt her brother start slightly. "You perceive it bears a late date."

Cousin Clarice grew radiant in the anticipation of the delightful surprise she had in reserve for her auditors.

"Yes—'August 20th'—not a month ago," Gertrude read, from the paper.

"The original, from which I obtained my precious copy, was apparently a rough draft," Cousin Clarice pursued, more beamingly. "The authoress can best tell how just is my transcript. Miriam, my love, have you heard the praises heaped by these kind friends upon your beautiful poem?"

Neale's hasty movement shook his sister's arm from its resting-place; the book dropped from his hold. No one, besides Gertrude, marked his angry front lowering upon the smirking mischief-maker; for Miriam arose—came forward at the artful summons. Livid with suppressed passion, she walked close up to her cousin—so near, that the little traitress shrank away, in cowardly fear of bodily violence.

"You took that paper from my desk! I will never forgive you while I live!"

She turned and left the room.

Nobody moved to stay her retreat, to apologize or to expostulate. Cousin Clarice buried her face in her handkerchief, and seemed to sob. Gertrude moved, as if to approach her, but Neale held her wrist fast. Mrs. Fry, as might have been expected, soonest found her tongue.

"I would not have had this thing happen for five hundred dollars—no, not for five thousand! Clarice Stanton, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"Fanny, you forget where you are!" interrupted her husband, warningly.

"No wonder, Hugh! I had hoped that poor, dear girl was safe in *my* house! I must go and make what excuse I can, to her, for the part I have unintentionally taken in this insult."

Her search for her friend was unsuccessful; a failure she

did not report on her return to the company. Cousin Clarice's state was that of the most saintly martyrization. She enjoyed, as much as Mrs. Fry hated, "a scene;" and, unabashed by the ireful spark of the black eyes and the inclement brow of the hostess, she put herself in position for an explanatory harangue by the time Mrs. Fry resumed her seat in the circle.

"My dear Fanny! I am grieved, beyond expression, at the unforeseen result of my innocent little plot. I assure you that I was ignorant of my cousin Miriam's extreme sensitiveness with regard to her poetical effusions. Her intellectual gifts are so often the theme of family conversations, and so many of her compositions have been submitted to my perusal, that I am surely excusable for my blunder."

Mrs. Fry looked at her, as if her sharp eyes would riddle the varnished crust of deceit.

"Miriam has never breathed an intimation to her own mother that she ever wrote poetry. Mrs. Hartley told me so yesterday. Such is her reserve on the subject, that it was only by accident they found out that many of her hymns and songs were original. It is a pity that Mrs. Hartley did not post you up also. It would have saved trouble."

Gertrude had mentally ranged herself upon Cousin Clarice's side, from the moment of the explosion. Greatly shocked by Mrs. Fry's rudeness and inhospitable plainness of speech, she hastened to smooth off its rough edges.

"But, Fanny — Miss Hartley will feel very differently when she is calmer, and has time to reflect upon her injustice to her cousin. If she is the sensible woman you represent her to be, she will view the sportive manœuvre in its proper light—as a kindly-meant plan for our gratification and hers."

"Thank you! thank you!" Cousin Clarice was moved

almost to tears. "I felt that *you* would not misjudge me, dear friend!" She laid her hand upon Gertrude's with an ardent squeeze.

"I see no room for wrong judgment," replied Miss Thorne. "No candid person can fail to understand the integrity of your intentions. Nor should you trouble yourself about this trifle. Miss Hartley's displeasure will soon pass over. Your explanation must satisfy her, as it does us."

"Unless—unless—" Cousin Clarice sighed profoundly, with an expression of dolorous anxiety.

"Unless what?" Gertrude seemed to be installed as comforter. "She would never, in her sane mind, disbelieve your account of the manner in which the paper came into your possession."

"Gertrude, you will oblige me by letting this subject alone!" interposed Neale, firmly. "I cannot see that it concerns you in the slightest degree."

"Pardon me, brother! I have done nothing but what was dictated by common justice and common politeness," responded she, as decidedly. "I cannot reconcile it to my conscience to remain passive, when I listen to unkind misconstructions, when I see distress that a word of sympathy may allay."

Thorne's pride and self-respect restrained him from entering upon a downright altercation, but his countenance was set in grave reproof—unsettled, for a second, by the withering scorn that crossed it, at the touch of Cousin Clarice's dry fingers upon his.

"Mr. Thorne, do not blame your sister for her goodness to one to whom friends and loving words are not daily luxuries. I own that I was in the wrong. I will ask my cousin's forgiveness: but mine was an inadvertence, rather than a fault; an error of forgetfulness, not the deliberate

baring of a secret wound. I can see, now, that with my knowledge of dear Miriam's past history—her early associations and sorrows—I should have known better than to expose the record of her heart-troubles. I thought that was dead and buried forever. I was mistaken! Yes, yes—I understand it all now! Poor girl! I cannot wonder that she was angry when I, of all her friends—I, who best knew what she has undergone—played what seemed to her so cruel a part. I will run, this moment, and entreat her to pardon me."

"Don't hurry yourself," said Mrs. Fry, coolly. "Perhaps you would like to wait and give us the solution of this Greek parable, or whatever it is, that you have been spinning out at such a rate."

"Be still, Fanny!" ordered Mr. Fry, aside.

He glanced at Thorne, and his wife trembled at the sight of the darkening face, its drawn muscles and burning eyes. Gertrude stood behind him, almost as pale and excited, her gaze bent eagerly upon Cousin Clarice.

"Go on!" she begged.

Neale raised his hand in an impatient gesture, enjoining her to silence, but did not unseal his lips.

"You must know to what I refer, Mrs. Fry." Cousin Clarice's eyes gloated upon her victim's pain, while her voice was plaintive. "I presume that all of these friends are familiar with the unhappy story—once only too public—of Miriam's engagement to William Bent."

Mrs. Fry was tolerably well acquainted with her opponent, but she had not expected this bold move, which would have stunned a fainter spirit. She retorted bravely:

"Nonsense! a childish flirtation, that nobody thinks of recollecting, except those who make a business of snapping up such 'unconsidered' sentimental trifles."

"It was not flirtation, but a formal engagement," said

Cousin Clarice, solemnly—"a deep and passionate attachment, that would have ended in marriage, but for the wise and timely interference of friends. You cannot deny this, Fanny."

"Have I pretended to deny it? I do say, however, that Miriam Hartley is a sensible girl, and her admirers have not been so few and far between, that she must be wasting her affections upon and pining over the memory of a boy, for whom she had a romantic notion when she was fifteen years old. A beau of mine, and a friend of yours, who had just popped the question to me, died when *I* was that age, and I did not trouble myself to sit in sackcloth for him all my days. I had faith that Providence and my own charms would soon replace him."

Cousin Clarice's visage was mottled with red—an odd and not a pleasing description of blush—and, for once, she was caught without an answer. Mr. Fry was sadly perturbed by this unfortunate skirmishing; yet he could not repress a smile at the hit, and its effect. He sympathized, heart and soul, with his spunky consort, and, peace-lover though he was, had the scene transpired in any other place than his own house, would unquestionably have remained neutral and let the pair fight it out.

"Excuse me, ladies!" he now said, in his pleasant, sensible way, "but it appears to me that we are spending more time in arguing over a trivial misunderstanding than is necessary or comfortable. I move an armistice and general reconciliation. Mr. Thorne, will you second the motion?"

"I second it," said Neale, steadily.

Mr. Fry put the question. Cousin Clarice said "aye," in pious forbearance; Gertrude with forced cheerfulness; sturdy little Mrs. Fry refused to vote at all. "And now, Fan," pursued her husband, "where is that ice-cream you hinted at to-day?"

She withdrew to order it, and Neale took advantage of the slight bustle and breaking up of the group to step through one of the long windows, into the cooler air and gloom of the piazza. Gertrude followed, and found him standing where they had sat five nights before, when she had wept upon his neck, and he had promised to delay the words which she felt now, more than she did then, would have sealed his lasting misery. The night was very dark. She could only discern his form, like a black shadow, against a white pillar of the portico. She took his hand; it was cold as clay, and as inert in her clasp.

"Don't speak to me, Gertrude!"

The voice was hard and husky, but not angry; and holding his fingers close to her heart, she awaited his pleasure—an indistinct, dawning perception of the mighty grief with which he was wrestling filling her soul with sorrowful love.

He spoke at last—striving to shake off the incubus, as did the shorn Samson the strange, horrible weakness that had overwhelmed him in his sleep.

"Well, Gerty! You are likely to have your bachelor brother all to yourself, until you are sick of the charge!"

The strained, false gayety went to Gertrude's heart.

"Weary of you, my precious brother!" She drew down his lips to hers, and wound her arms about his neck. "Oh, if my love could only compensate to you for this disappointment! Dearest, it is for the best. You could never have been happy with this girl. I am thankful that the scales have fallen from your eyes before you had gone too far. Miriam Hartley is not fit to be your wife!"

"Hush!" She relaxed her embrace at the stern accent. "I cannot hear you name her yet! I cannot forget—cannot grow callous all at once. You *hurt* me!"

He winced and groaned, as at absolute physical pain.

"Gertrude! Mr. Thorne!" called Mrs. Fry. "Your cream is melting! Come!"

A dusky form glided from the screen of vine-draped lattice work at the end of the porch, when the brother and sister were gone. It was Miriam, returned from her unquiet wanderings through the garden. Arrested on her way to the drawing-room, her heart full of gentle and penitent resolves, by Thorne's approach, and then by Gertrude's, she had stood still in the walk, without venturing to move, and heard every word that passed between the two.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FIRST BRIDESMAID.

A LINE of light under Miriam's door proclaimed that she had not retired, when Cousin Clarice knocked for admission that night.

"Who is there?" was demanded from within.

"It is I, my dear!"

"What do you want?"

"To speak to you one moment, Miriam, love!"

"I cannot see you. I am busy!"

Cousin Clarice stooped, applied her mouth to the key-hole, and breathed a cautious warning.

"My dear cousin! I am afraid Mr. Thorne will overhear us, and think strange of all this."

"Who cares!"

Another interval of silence. Every thing was still as the grave in Thorne's chamber on one side of the hall, while the listener could hear Miriam moving to and fro, unlocking and shutting drawers, and shaking out clothing—a diligence of industry singularly inappropriate to the hour—nearly twelve o'clock. Stimulated by curiosity, she gave another rap, louder and sharper. The key turned, then the bolt, and Miriam appeared.

"What do you want?" she repeated.

Cousin Clarice walked in, uninvited. "Shut the door, please! I have come to tell you how sorry I am that my fond, foolish scheme, meant to bring you pleasure, offended you, and to ask your pardon for having given you pain."

"Very well," said Miriam, "I will try and forgive you."

She busied herself at an open drawer, unfolding and examining its contents—collars, undersleeves, handkerchiefs, and the like. Cousin Clarice "made a note" of her occupation; likewise of the dresses spread upon the bed, and a trunk that had been dragged into the middle of the floor.

"Have you nothing more to say to me, in return for my frank acknowledgment?" continued the elder cousin.

"No. There are many things which I could say, but nothing that would do any good."

"Are you not willing to retract the mortifying charge you brought against me, in the hearing of our friends? You must believe me when I declare that I picked up the rough draft of those lines out there, in the flower-garden."

"Perhaps you did—after you dropped it there! You stole it from my desk, on Sunday afternoon, while I was reading to the servants in the kitchen. I was told by one who saw you thus employed, that you had inspected my papers, but I did not miss that one. It is all done now—and it is useless to quarrel about it."

Cousin Clarice was thunderstruck. Who was the spy upon her exploring expedition? Not her uncle, for he was six miles away at the time. Not Mrs. Hartley, for the affectionate cousin had seen her snugly settled for her after-dinner siesta, before she glided down to the study. A servant's tale she could safely contradict.

"I demand the name of my accuser!" she said, dignifiedly.

"What?" Miriam lifted her stony face from the task, and spoke wearedly.

"I insist upon knowing who your informant was. If you refuse to give him or her up, I shall complain to your grandfather of the groundless imputation you have cast upon my character."

"You can do it, then. I shall not tell you who it was."

"Was it one of the servants?"

"I shall not tell you!" in the unmoved tone she had employed throughout the dialogue.

"Was it Mr. Thorne?"

"No!" exploded upon the catechist's tympanum, with a concussion that made her jump.

The real detective was sleeping soundly in the crib behind Cousin Clarice, unsuspected, and unconscious of the mighty fire one little act of his had kindled. He it was, who, sent by Miriam to the house for a book she desired to read to her sable class, had, while seeking it in the parlor, in his habitually noiseless style, espied through the intermediate door, Cousin Clarice in the study, overhauling his aunt's writing-case. He had reported the deed, and been forbidden to communicate it to any one else. Nothing could lower her prim cousin in Miriam's estimation, and this incident amused more than it angered her. It seemed beneath contempt itself, until the reading of the purloined article. This, as its date indicated, was written not long after the "Aurora Leigh" afternoon—as Thorne called it, and suggested by their talk at that time. Morbid modesty, and a foolish dread lest Neale should, remembering the origin of the fantasy, imagine her a love-lorn girl, and himself the object of the unwarranted sentiment, joined with indignation at the shameless trick practised upon her, to produce a burst of passion unparalleled since the days of her wild, wayward childhood.

After fulminating the negative that had jarred the equilibrium of Cousin Clarice's nerves, Miriam continued her work, laying aside this, and returning that to the drawer, taking no more notice of her visitant than she did of the chair she graced by occupying.

"I am glad it was not he!" Cousin Clarice resumed, pres-

ently. "I should be sorry to alter my excellent opinion of your particular friend. By the way, my dear, perverse child, he was quite disconsolate when Mrs. Fry announced that you had run off home, under Parker's escortage, without waiting for him. You must be less fitful, my darling, or you will wear out his devotion. I could see that neither he nor his sister liked your truancy, or your absenting yourself from the parlor the greater part of the evening. I say nothing of the tempest that attended your vanishing. Be advised by me, my dearest, and if you really desire to captivate this amiable gentleman—"

"Clarice Stanton!" The sore-hearted, hunted creature sprang to her feet and confronted her tormentor—beat off the loathed thing that was sucking her life-blood. "If you ever presume to talk to me in this strain again, I will have you expelled from this house, never to set foot in it afterward. I have the influence and the will to do it. I have but to say to my grandfather that either you or I must quit these premises—and you go! One sentence to him of your ceaseless persecutions; your hateful inuendoes; your meddling and spying; your innumerable falsehoods—and he would throw you off as he would a viper! Hereafter I command you to *let me alone!* You have been the plague-spot of my life, and the limit of my forbearance is reached!"

She unclosed the door and pointed to the hall; and Cousin Clarice marched out, if not with all the other honors of war, at least with her flag flying; *i. e.*—her handkerchief depending from her eyes.

Mrs. Fry had "the dumps" all the next day. She was vexed with Cousin Clarice for her evening's work; with herself, for not giving her a round "setting down;" with her husband, for hindering her from doing it; with Gertrude, because she credited and encouraged Miss Stanton's stories; with Thorne, for seeming startled by the revelation

of that "girlish folly, out of which the cunning witch made such capital."

"What if Miriam was in love at fifteen? Doesn't it stand to reason, that she must have outgrown the disease by this time? I have lost all patience with interlopers and mischief-makers—"

"And match-makers?" interrogated her husband, to whom she made a "clean breast" of her grievances, when he came home to dinner.

"Hugh Fry! that is the most unjust word you have ever said to me, since the day I became your lawful and wedded wife! I abominate match-making. You know that I do! But, when Heaven has decreed that two people shall love and marry, and live happily together forever afterward, I say it is a burning shame, and moreover a heinous crime, for a fidgetty old maid to controvert the plans of Providence."

"Fie! my love! I had hoped that you were more sound upon the doctrine of predestination. What is to be *will* be —notwithstanding all the plots of all the Cousin Clarices in the world."

"Thank goodness! there is but *one* in the universe! But Hugh, darling, I am just expiring with longing to set this matter straight, in some way. What may I do? talk to Gertrude, or to Mr. Thorne, or to Miriam—"

"Or call out Cousin Clarice—pop-guns for two—tea for one!" finished Mr. Fry. "Just do nothing at all, Fan! You cannot help matters—that I can see. What could you tell Mr. or Miss Thorne, that would serve to alter whatever opinion they have conceived of last night's events? You can offer no excuse for Miriam's ebullition of temper, that you did not bring forward then; and no argument of yours can remove the fact of that early engagement."

"I could assure Mr. Thorne that Miriam doesn't care for a lover who has not been to see her for four years."

"Let him find that out for himself, my dear. You are not certain that she is not still betrothed to poor Willie. To my certain knowledge, they have heard from him within two years. He may yet present himself, and win and wear his early love."

"Why, Hugh! I tell you she doesn't love him a bit! Any one, with half an eye, can see that. I am surprised at you!"

"Nevertheless, your best policy is to be prudent with all the parties concerned. Above all, do not embarrass affairs yet more by betraying to Miriam what passed after she left the parlor; it will all come right, in the end. Meanwhile, don't let me see my wife's bright face clouded by useless anxiety."

His injunction to discretion was timely. Dr. Stanton's carriage drove into the gates, about an hour before sunset, and Miriam alighted with Willie. Gertrude had gone to ride with her brother—a circumstance upon which Mrs. Fry congratulated herself, as she hurried to the door to receive her visitors. Miriam looked ill and harassed her friend discovered, when she had embraced her; but she smiled, and replied in lively terms to her welcome and inquiries after her welfare.

"I begin to feel somewhat fagged out," she said, accepting the luxurious chair her hostess wheeled forward. "I have concluded to go to Max's wedding; and, furthermore, to obey Louisa's imperative requisition—too peremptory to be called an invitation—for my valuable company and services, during the few days that remain between this and the important Thursday. Since my wish is to make myself as useful as I can, by keeping up her spirits, arranging preliminaries, and the thousand-and-one duties pertaining to the office of first bridesmaid, I must set off immediately. I have telegraphed to Max to meet me, to-morrow afternoon, at

the Dépôt in F——, and take me out to Mr. Galt's. It is but six miles from town, and he will send word to Louisa, to-day, that I am coming."

She rattled this off in a feverish manner, that struck Mrs. Fry painfully, acceptable as was the substance of the communication.

"But how will you ever get ready in season?"

"Oh, where there is a will, there is a way; and I have gone to work with a will of forty-horse power. Willie and I have been shopping all day, except during the two hours we spent at the mantua-makers'. I have two establishments employed upon my paraphernalia. Sounds important—doesn't it? Every thing is to be forwarded to me on Tuesday, without fail. One part of my errand here, this afternoon, is to request you to look in at Mrs. Webb's and Miss Lyons', on Monday morning, and see how they are getting on with the dresses. Please urge them to expedition, if things appear to be behindhand. We have some pretty fabrics in their hands. Willie and I chose them"—smiling at the boy. "Milly's man has excellent taste in ladies' dress."

Willie colored with pleasure, and Mrs. Fry gave him a second kiss.

"I thought he would not oppose your going, when he understood that you would enjoy the trip," she replied, carrying out Miriam's palpable design of setting the approaching separation before him in its most favorable light. "Milly leaves us so seldom, that we ought not to complain when she does run off for four or five days—isn't it so, Willie?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the little fellow, bravely. "I don't want to keep her at home, when it is best for her to go. She talked to me about it this morning, when I woke up—before she said a word to Mamma or Grandpa—and she said that she would not stir a step, if she thought that I

would be unhappy without her. I don't mean to be—if I can help it—for, you see, a week is just seven days, and I shall feel so glad, every night, when I can say, 'There is one more gone!'"

In his *naïveté*, he had, while endeavoring to look only at the bright side, conveyed a touching idea of the loneliness of heart, that would find its best consolation in thinking of the flight of time, bringing nearer the hour of reunion.

Mrs. Fry answered quickly, more to keep up Miriam's courage than his: "Yes! and I must have you here to spend a day with Fanny, and you shall have a tea-party in the garden, and as many flowers as you like; and there is a beauty of a white bantam in the poultry-yard, which I mean to give you. She will lay an egg every day, and you must save them all for Milly. Just think! you will have six or seven, maybe eight, by the time she comes back. I will give you a nice little basket to keep them in. Then, Fanny shall pay you a visit, and Mamma will let you have tea in the grove or the porch; and you shall teach Fanny to ride Bruno."

"Won't that be splendid?" cried the boy, his face one flash of delight. "Mrs. Fry is a very lovely lady—don't you think so, Milly?"

"Indeed I do!" A sensitive tremor in her smile bespoke her sincerity. She put her hand into her friend's. "Believe me, Fanny, I feel this kindness as done to me. No one else will miss and need me as he will. My heart will be lighter for your promises to him. But we must be going. My trunk is but half-packed. Say 'Good-bye' to Mr. Fry—and Miss Thorne—will you?"

"Gertrude is not at home," said Mrs. Fry, thoughtlessly. "She is out riding with her brother. If he tells her of your intended departure, she may call by to bid you farewell."

"Mr. Thorne cannot inform her of what he does not know himself, as yet," rejoined Miriam, hurriedly. "And, to be

candid with you, I had rather not be interrupted by company this evening. It is my last at home, and I shall be busy."

"All right!" said the ready-witted lady. "I will say whatever is needful and becoming."

They were quitting the room, and Miriam fell a little in the rear—not so far, however, that Mrs. Fry did not observe her gaze toward the embayed window; the eyes full of desolation and longings, tenderness and despair—such a look as a mother might fix upon the sinking coffin of her first-born.

The affectionate, compassionate heart overflowed in a stream of tears, in Mrs. Fry's "Good-bye" to the sufferer, with whom she could not condole in any other language.

"God bless you, Milly! You know that I love you dearly. I could not be more fond of a sister."

"Thank you, Fanny!" The hot lips worked in smothered emotion. "You are more to me than a sister would be, perhaps—a disinterested friend."

Willie regarded this episode with widening eyes, that were suspiciously moist, although he kept up a feint of unshaken fortitude. Mrs. Fry forced herself to laugh, upon catching a glimpse of the gathering mists.

"I shall send for you to-morrow morning, my boy, and you can take bantam and basket, with one egg, back at night. We will coax Mamma into giving Milly a grand dinner the day after she gets home, and make her a cake with your eggs. The more you have, the richer it will be —remember!"

She watched the carriage, until it turned a corner; then went back into the house, and treated herself to the rare luxury of a "comfortable" crying-spell. She would not ask Thorne to stay to tea, when he brought Gertrude home; but Mr. Fry did, and he declined: "He had a headache, and must go home."

"I wish it was a worse *heartache* than any you ever felt before!" thought the hostess, savagely; relentless to his jaded air, and pale, unsmiling face, since he chose to ascribe these to bodily pain.

"Miriam Hartley was here, a while ago," she said, pointedly, *at* him, while she affected to address his sister. "She goes to F—— to-morrow, having decided to attend my cousin's marriage. She left adieux for you."

"I am much obliged to her!" Gertrude's eyes strayed to her brother, to note the effect of this intelligence.

He was a shade paler, she fancied, and did not speak, as he raised his hat to both ladies, but he walked away with his customary bold, elastic tread, and her sensations were, upon the whole, decidedly those of relief, if not rejoicing.

The days were growing shorter, and the gray curtain of twilight was doubled, this evening, by slow-rising clouds. The morrow would not be a propitious day for travelling—Thorne reflected, chancing to cast a look skyward. He shivered with the thought, or the chill of the coming storm. The piazza was deserted, he noticed, on nearing home, and the house had a dreary air he had never seen about it before. The front door was closed, as were all the shutters, excepting those of one parlor-window. That apartment was tenanted, for he heard the piano. Pulling his hat over his brows, he sat down in a chair beside the casement. He knew the musician's touch, and the piece she played—"Le Rève," that matchless miracle of pathetic melody; rich in varied and thrilling harmonies, divine in sweetness. It was the first music he had ever heard from her hand in that room. Had she forgotten what he remembered so faithfully? He rested his elbow upon his knee, his head upon his hand, and let his soul drift out with the mournful waves that flowed over him. They made no weak plaint; no sharp cry or peevish murmur was blent with their solemn

surge. They told the story of a broken heart—but a heart grand in its very wreck; whose despair was majesty; its death-throes the agony of a god.

He made no moan over the ruin of his best hopes. All day he had fought against despondency and sad repinings; carried a cheerful front, while within his bosom, Reason warred with Love—full grown and nourished into the strength of maturity, through weeks and months past. The most obdurate skeptic has his point of credulous vulnerability, and a sudden assault there, will strike conviction to the soul, when fact and argument have failed. Thorne would never have admitted the idea of Miriam's unworthiness—the faults of manner and character, which Gertrude strove so strenuously to set in review before him. But he was utterly devoid of vanity, and with the certainty of this early betrothal for the background, such portions of their intercourse as had sustained his hopes of finally winning her for himself, were forgotten, or assumed a different aspect. Once before, he had seen her, as he believed, snatched away from him and given to another, and, in that temporary delusion, had an imperfect foreshadowing of this real and heavier bereavement. He was young and impulsive—what cooler heads would have called romantic, and had William Bent presented himself, a confident, exultant bridegroom, to bear away his promised wife, the shock to Neale could hardly have exceeded his horror of disappointment, when told that she still loved and mourned the long-absent prodigal.

Yet there was in this seeming extravagance of sorrowful renunciation, evidence of his correct understanding of Miriam's heart and disposition. False accusation, ignominy, opposition—would confirm, not destroy, her attachment for one in whose innocence and worth she retained her faith. Desertion and waning affection might arouse pride to conceal her hurt, but there would be no room for a second love,

a trust as absolute in any other. Holding this opinion, Thorne was not so humble as to be willing to propose the exchange of his undivided, ungrudged wealth of devotion for the pittance of friendly regard, which was all she could offer in return. While she wept "vain tears" over the Past, he would not point to a Future, to be spent with, and for him. Whatever of solace there was in brotherly sympathy and kindness, was freely hers; but the heart's richer distillment—the beaten oil of its sanctuary, was too precious to be used as ointment for the wounds made by another man's inconstancy. It may have been an overstrained point of honor, a high-flown conception of the nature of the bond which should unite the true husband and wife; but the scruple, or the principle was there—and the anguish!

A few sullen drops pattered upon the roof overhead, and there fell with them, here and there, sere leaves from the trees, forerunners of the year's decay. "The Autumn rain!" He compressed his lips tightly, at the keen thrill of pain.

"Oh, my lost love!"

And after that one shuddering cry, the brave soul sat down again by the newly-made grave, and was still.

So still—outwardly so tranquil, that Cousin Clarice examined his face vainly, for some sign that she had not spent her strength upon him for naught, and the short evening was gone before she could determine whether he were unhurt or merely stoical. The family-party was duller than usual, but Thorne's headache, and Miriam's fatigue, accounted for their want of liveliness. Cousin Clarice chippered, like a fussy sparrow, to everybody and about every thing. To Miriam she was oppressively attentive, and profuse of sweet sayings; predicting conquests by the score and compliments by the hundred; bubbling over with delight at the brilliant scenes opening before the first bridesmaid during the next ten days.

"*Ten* days, Milly!" repeated Willie, deprecatingly. He was allowed to sit up this evening as late as the rest, in consideration of Miriam's departure on the morrow—and now nestled upon the sofa beside her, his blue eyes following her every motion with loving, wistful meaning. "You said eight, I thought!"

"Only eight, dear—leaving out to-morrow. I shall not go until the middle of the day, and I expect to come home on Friday."

"It sounds like a great, long time!" The child laid back his head, wearily.

"It will seem shorter by daylight!" said Miriam, reasuringly. "You are tired to-night, and a little low-spirited."

"Am I?" asked he, in a grave, old way. "Is that why I keep wondering what I should do if I were never to see you again?"

"Willie! my son! what puts that notion into your head?" exclaimed Dr. Stanton, with manifest uneasiness. "What should happen to hinder Milly from coming back to us, safe and well?"

"I don't know, Grandpa—only I've been thinking about it, and how the cars run off the track, sometimes, and people fall sick and die—"

"And get married!" clipped in Cousin Clarice, with kittenly vivacity.

Willie's solemn observation of her was amusing to behold.

"No! I don't think so much about *those things* as you do, Cousin Clarice. I am not afraid that Milly will get married and leave me, for I am sure she wouldn't! But dying is different. I don't exactly know whether it is right to feel so, but it does seem to me that it would break my heart to have Milly go to heaven before the dear Saviour is ready for me."

Unable to speak, Miriam arose, raised her nursling in her arms, and carried him from the room.

Thorne tarried a few minutes later, then said "Good-night!" He trod softly in the upper hall; paused outside his chamber-door, to hearken for Willie's lullaby. Wind and rain were loud without; but he caught the faint murmur of the familiar air—like the far-off sigh of an exiled spirit.

He lingered in the hall until it ceased;—"For," he said to himself, in a mood that had taken the contagion from the boy's presentiments, and was tinged by his own recent reverses—"who knows if I shall ever hear her sing it again?"

CHAPTER XIX.

"TALITHA-CUMI."

THORNE spent but a small fraction of his time at home during the next few days. He was at his study early in the morning and late at night; granting himself no recreation from the severity of mental application, beyond a round of visits to sick and afflicted parishioners.

From one of these, a ride of five miles into the country, he was returning on Monday afternoon. The day was sultry—the suffocating, sickening heat of untimely summer, that weighs alike upon spirits and body. There were muddy spots in low and sheltered places, but the middle of the road was dusty, showing how rapid had been the evaporation since the late heavy rains. The raised footpath on either side of the highway was dry, and its green borders rankly luxuriant, under the influence of dampness and heat, as propitious for vegetable growth as they were unwholesome to man. At the bend of the road, where it swept away from the thoroughfare to the town into the rural street leading past Mr. Fry's gate toward Dr. Stanton's, Neale came upon two children, sitting on the turfy bank. They were Willie and his faithful page, Tom. The latter jumped up at the sound of the horse's hoofs, but his little master did not move. His hands lay upon his lap, and there was a drooping, listless air about his whole figure, that attracted Thorne's notice at once.

"Willie! man!" he said, blithely. "What is the matter? Where are you going?"

The child lifted his heavy eyes. "Mamma said that I might walk as far as Mr. Fry's to meet her and Cousin Clarice on their way back, and ride with them in the carriage, but I believe I won't. I am so tired. I thought I would rest a while here, and then go home again."

Thorne dismounted and went to him. "What has made you tired? Is it because the weather is warm, or have you been running?"

"Nary step!" said Tom.

"Tom! please don't say 'nary!' It isn't *correct!*" returned Willie, languidly. "We didn't run, sir, and I am not warm."

Thorne felt the limp fingers. They were cold; his cheeks were colorless, and there were dark circles under his eyes.

"Are you sick, my boy?"

"Oh, no, sir! only tired—*very* tired!

"Would you like to ride home with me?"

"If it would not trouble you, sir."

He stood patiently, while Thorne got on his horse, and guided him close up to the bank.

"A little nearer, Willie! Now, give me both hands!"

A dexterous swing seated him upon the pommel, and they rode slowly on, Tom trotting along the roadside. Thorne again questioned the boy as to his health, and being answered as before, but more animatedly, dismissed the trifling anxiety engendered by his spiritless appearance and tone. Willie was not disposed to talk, but he seemed contented and comfortable, leaning against his protector's breast and watching his horse's ears. He smiled when he saw Parker standing at the gate, and held out his arms to him, to be taken down.

"I have had a nice ride, Uncle Parker. I am much obliged to you, Mr. Thorne."

They started up the walk together, but Thorne observed

how uncertainly the little feet trod the smooth gravel, and that his knees bent under him at each step. He stooped, took the light weight in his arms, and carried him to the house. The Doctor was never at home at this hour, and Thorne had learned from Willie that both ladies were out; so he did not go in-doors. Taking one of the rocking-chairs, that were always in the porch, he rested the head of his charge upon his shoulder, and rocked him gently. How often he had seen Miriam hold and nurse him thus, in his nervous or sick turns! The boy sighed once or twice, in weariness, or oppressed by the close, hot air, but a considerable time elapsed before he spoke.

"Mr. Thorne!"

"Well, my man?"

"One thing I wanted to go to Mr. Fry's for, was to see if Mrs. Fry had attended to Milly's dresses to-day. Milly asked her to do it, for I heard her."

"I have no doubt that she did it then."

"Would you mind speaking to her about it, if you go to see your sister to-night? You know it would be a pity to have Milly disappointed."

"Of course it would; I will remind Mrs. Fry."

"Thank you, sir!"

Thorne smiled at the precocious solicitude of the baby-knight.

"You are a thoughful little fellow!" he said, stroking his cheek. Aside from his love for children, there was a strange pleasure in caring for, and caressing *her* fondling.

"I couldn't help remembering what Milly said. She is all I have, you know, sir."

"Not all! You have your Grandpapa and Mamma, and a great many other friends."

"But they don't belong to me entirely, and she does! I love her with every bit of my heart—don't you?"

"Everybody ought to love her, because she is noble and good," rejoined Thorne, serious enough, now.

"Cousin Clarice says that I make her my idol," pursued Willie, "and that it is wicked to have idols. She said so yesterday. I went to sleep while she was reading to me, and she didn't like it, I am afraid. She asked me if that was the way I did when Milly read to me on Sundays, and I told her 'no'—but that Milly always found pretty stories in the Bible, and that I couldn't understand the 'Psalms of David' very well. I had rather hear how he took the sheep out of the lion's mouth, and killed Goliath. Is that wrong, sir?"

"Not at all! It is the same with other children. I felt just so, when I was a boy. Nor is it sinful for us to be very fond—as fond as we can be—of those who love and are kind to us. Our Saviour tells us to love one another."

Willie heaved a satisfied sigh, and was lured, by the ready sympathy of his companion, to greater freedom of speech.

"There was one *beautiful* story that Milly told me, last Sunday and once afterward—the night before she went away. I asked her to do it then, for fear I should forget it while she was gone. I couldn't sleep, for ever so long, last night, for thinking of it. It was about the little girl that the dear Saviour brought to life again, after she was dead. Her father's name was Ja—Ji—"

"Jairus;" Thorne helped him out.

"Yes, sir! Would it tire you very much to tell it over to me, just one time?" he asked, diffidently.

"It will please me; but I do not promise to make it as interesting as—'Milly' does."

He did his best to simplify the Scripture narrative, and bring out in striking relief, the passages most likely to interest a child. He was conversant with Miriam's style of narrative, and conformed to it as far as he could. Willie

listened intently, and at the close, passed his arm around his friend's neck.

"I *love* you, Mr. Thorne!"

"Not better than I do you—Willie dear!" replied Neale, bending to kiss him. His lips and breath were hot, and Thorne, looking more narrowly at him, saw that the cheeks, so white half an hour before, were crimson; the eyes restless and glittering. His hands were also burning—the pulse racing madly.

"He is sick!" thought Thorne, with a painful sinking of the heart. "If he should be ill, and she away"—

He could not pursue the imagination. Welcome was the sight of Dr. Stanton's buggy on the distant road; great the pleasure of hearing his voice, calling at the gate for Reuben; greater the comfort, when his benevolent face bowed over the fever-stricken boy, and his skilful touch marked the throbs in the small wrist.

"Very high!" was his laconic comment, accompanied by a slight shake of the head, that was mechanically professional, while the awakening fears of the father changed his countenance to an expression of lively uneasiness.

Mrs. Hartley had not returned, and Willie, half delirious, refused to allow himself to be put to bed by the servant summoned to perform the duty. He clung to Thorne's neck, with frantic energy, and was deaf to the woman's persuasions and his grandfather's orders.

"I think I can manage it," said Neale, finally. "This excitement is the worst thing imaginable for him."

He sent the servant out of the room, and with his own hands undressed the now tractable child; immersed his feet in the warm bath, laid him in bed, and administered the medicine Dr. Stanton had ready; never leaving him, until he had fallen into a profound slumber.

It was a quiet and anxious household, that evening—a

sorrowful one, when the morrow dawned, and the darling of the flock lay wrestling with quick, hot pants, rolling eye and tossing limbs—with the disease, that had struck its fangs deep into his constitution.

"You will send for Miss Miriam—will you not?" inquired Thorne, over the breakfast, that was scarcely tasted, except by Cousin Clarice.

"Perhaps it would be best," responded Dr. Stanton, sadly. "Yet we might wait a day longer—until the case assumes a more decided aspect for better or for worse. The crisis cannot be very distant. The fever is high, and the boy not strong—"

He faltered.

"The more imperative, then, the reasons for informing her immediately of his condition!" said Neale. "I have no right to dictate, of course, my dear sir—I only judge from what I have seen of the affection existing between Willie and his aunt—"

"But suppose we call her home upon an unfounded alarm!" interrupted Cousin Clarice, briskly. "Think of the fright, and then the disappointment to her, and the regret of her friends! Children often rally from these violent attacks more rapidly than they are prostrated by them. I have heard you remark upon this, dear Uncle. Cousin Edith says she has seen Willie quite as ill as he is now, several times, before he was three years old. By the time Miriam can reach Limestone, he may be out of danger—almost well."

"That is very true!" said the Doctor, thoughtfully and hopefully.

Cousin Clarice went on. "By following your advice, Uncle, and waiting a day or two, we may spare her many hours of excruciating suspense. Leave her to the enjoyment she anticipates so eagerly. Cousin Edith and I will nurse the precious lamb as tenderly and assiduously as she

could. Is it not wiser and kinder, Mr. Thorne, to delay communication with her until there is real danger—or, as I confidently hope will be the case, until our sweet babe is convalescent? He does not miss her—would not know her if she were here—therefore is none the worse for her absence."

"He calls for her continually!" said Thorne, choking down his indignation, out of respect for Dr. Stanton.

"The ravings of delirium! So he calls Fanny Fry, and Tom, and Bruno. He would not know her or any of the others. Why, when I asked him, this morning, if he knew me, he said 'Yes'—that I was 'one of the Psalms of David, and didn't believe in idols!'"

"Poor child!" Dr. Stanton smiled, but his eyes were full of tears. "His brain was always too active, and it runs riot when he is sick. At any rate, we will not telegraph before noon."

To this Neale raised no objection. He wished to avoid the appearance of obstinate opposition to the plans of his venerable host, and was willing to spare Miriam suspense, so far as was consistent with justice to Willie and mercy to her. His determination to have her summoned on the morrow, at latest, unless there should be a marked change for the better, was not altered by Cousin Clarice's representation of the child's vagaries. That he associated her with the Sabbath's reading and lecture, was to Thorne an assurance that a calmer mood and gentler fancies would attend upon Miriam's presence and nursing. The touch of her hand and lips, her loving accents, would, he believed, quiet the excited nerves, if not recall the straying senses.

Noon came—fiery, glaring still! Mrs. Hartley stood by the bed, wetting Willie's parched lips, and laying ice upon the beating temples. Rhoda, the mulatto nurse, fanned him from the other side of the couch, which was drawn into

the middle of the room. The golden curls were soaked with the water dripping from the ice-cloths, and crushed upon the pillow by the unquiet head—the blue eyes were wild, and unnaturally bright—and mingled with the moans of suffering, were broken sentences, betraying that his mind was still far away. It was but natural that the image enshrined in his heart, should be most constantly the theme of his thoughts, even in their disorder; yet Neale with difficulty restrained his tears, as the loved name fell again and again from his tongue, in every variety of endearing intonation. Sometimes he called her—shrieked breathlessly for her to come to him—to take him—to stay with him; at others, he imagined that she was by him—that they were walking, talking, sporting together.

"Let me take your place, my dear lady!" said Thorne to Mrs. Hartley. "Will you not rest now? You were up all night."

"I lay down for an hour this morning," she answered. "Clarice relieved me here, and forced me to take a little rest. She has been with him nearly all the forenoon. I do not know what I should do without her. She is a practised nurse—one of the best I ever saw."

The good lady's belief in her would-have-been sister-in-law, and the ascendency of the artful over the single mind, had long since ceased to arouse Thorne's wonder or impatience. He was accustomed to meet her praises of "Clarice's" perfections by a courteous silence, and Mrs. Hartley, partly divining the reason of his reserve, became doubly anxious to convert him to her views. Miriam's contumacious conduct, in this respect, was a sore thorn in her mother's side. As she had many times informed her daughter, she regarded Cousin Clarice as her elder child, and her secret prayer, for years, had been that the two might feel toward one another as sisters should. Loving Thorne almost

as well as if he were her son, the desire extended itself to him, and he bore her transparent wiles to effect this end, very patiently, in consideration of the feeling that incited her to the harmless guile.

In pursuance of his non-committal policy, he knelt by the low bed, and bathed Willie's hands and wrists—shifted the ice—blew coolingly upon the wet brow, and said never a word.

"What do you think of sending for Miriam, to-day?" queried Mrs. Hartley, in the subdued tone suited to a sick chamber.

Willie turned his head. "Hey?" he said, hoarsely. "Milly, Bruno and I have been racing down hill, and I am tired! My head aches! Please take me in your lap!"

"There is my answer!" said Neale, significantly. "If my opinion has any weight, she will be here by this time to-morrow. Or, if we were to telegraph at once, there is a possibility that she would receive the message in time to catch the evening train."

"But," said Mrs. Hartley, nervously, "can she do any real good? Ought we not rather to be thankful that she is not here to witness his sufferings, since she cannot relieve them? It would be a terrible trial to her."

"If she were taken sick at Mr. Galt's, would you find it easy to forgive the so-called friends who concealed the fact of her illness from you—denied you your right and privilege to nurse her—allowed you to remain in ignorance of her state until she lay dangerously ill—perhaps dying?"

"Indeed I could never pardon them! It would be cruel—barbarous! And you think that Miriam may look at this case in that light?"

"I am convinced that she cannot, and will not, do otherwise."

"How does that strike *you*, Clarice?"

Thorne gave a little start at the name, and set his teeth more tightly, upon beholding the felt-shodden spy standing at his back.

"I do not consider the cases analogous," was the cool response. "Miriam is your child; Willie is only her nephew; belongs to you, as his grandmother, more than to her. Her presence here would unnerve us all. Her impulses are strong and imperfectly controlled, and at this juncture we need persons of experience and equable temperament."

Willie's fingers were groping among the bed-clothes.

"Milly! Milly! where are you?" he moaned, in the dry articulation of fever.

Thorne secured the roving hand, and chafed it softly; his heart bleeding with pitying tenderness for the child and his absent guardian; while its angry swellings warned him not to reply yet to the abhorrent arguments whose cruelty was only matched by their consummate impertinence.

"Is the woman a fiend incarnate?" he thought. "What advantage can she derive from Miriam's continued absence? What is it to her whether she returns on Wednesday or Friday? whether she takes charge of this boy, or officiates as Max Wilde's bridesmaid?"

It was an enigma of evil he could not solve, for he was a novice to the delights of revenge—the satiation of a cherished spite; could not enter into the secrets of a petty despotism, that gloried in being chief manager—the highest authority—were it only in a child's sick-room. And it must be borne in mind that, all this while, the fears lest Willie would not recover were shadowy and unexpressed, except as hinted at in Dr. Stanton's incomplete sentence at the breakfast-table, and Thorne's imaginary example to Mrs. Hartley. Cousin Clarice's love for Willie was not so great as to give birth to serious apprehensions. Most sick children got well, she thought. They bore illness better than

grown people; else, why were measles, scarlet fever, and whooping-cough, made a part of their early education? The notion of sending for Miriam was quite as absurd to her as she declared it to be; and if she had had no other reason for opposing it, the discovery that Mr. Thorne favored the scheme would have set her against it. A meeting between the lovers, in the present circumstances of the family, would, in all likelihood, repair the breach her industrious brains and tongue had made.

Finding that her opponent returned no answer, she again took up the thread of discourse:

"Uncle says that the fever will soon run its course. I should not be surprised if the crisis were already reached. The probability is, that in a couple of days the child will be on his feet again. If this is so, do you not see, dear cousin, the folly of reversing Miriam's arrangements? Her dresses have gone. At this late hour, it will not be practicable to supply her place in the bridal train. There lies the choice —irreparable inconvenience to two hundred people, on one hand; and, on the other, the delay of a day to us."

Dr. Stanton had entered, and was examining Willie. Thorne watched his countenance, for some alteration in its settled anxiety, but there was none.

"No perceptible change," he said to the young man, rising from his seat on the bed.

"Can you form any conjecture as to the probable duration of this stage of the disease?"

"None. It depends upon his strength."

"And his recovery, upon the elasticity of his constitution?"

"Yes—I suppose so," the Doctor reluctantly admitted. The parent was loath to believe what the physician could not controvert. "But I am called every day to see children far more ill than I think him at present, who yet re-

cover speedily. This delirium is not so unfavorable a symptom, in his case, as would seem to a stranger. The least fever makes him light-headed."

"Are your inquiries quite judicious, Mr. Thorne?" said Cousin Clarice, in a pretended 'aside.' "Surely, my uncle's love for his grandchild would quicken him to a sense of his danger, if there were any. Is it not best for those of us who are nurses, to keep our minds calm and free, relying upon a kind Providence and the medical skill that is so seldom exerted in vain, instead of tempting that Providence and insulting that skill by weak forebodings?"

Our minister was not a model of meekness, nor was patience with hypocrisy his cardinal virtue. As an impartial chronicler, I am bound to confess the odds to be greatly in favor of the supposition that, had Cousin Clarice been a man, he would have been quietly beckoned down-stairs to the front door, and that his next landing-place would have been effected—by the opportune assistance of a boot-toe—upon the ground at the foot of the porch-steps. But, intolerable as was this snaky tormentor, her gender protected her, and she had no response beside such as she could gather from a certain closer grimness of mouth and chin, and a disdainful side-glance, that might have been aimed at a venomous toad. He left the room in company with Dr. Stanton; but, ere he could introduce the subject nearest his heart, Cousin Clarice wormed herself between them, and, putting her hand within her uncle's arm, led him away for a "medical consultation," she affirmed, with impudent hardihood.

After this, Thorne was not disappointed by Dr. Stanton's answer to his offer to take a message for him to the telegraph office:

"I thank you, Mr. Thorne, but we have concluded to postpone sending for Miriam until to-morrow. By the morning, I may be better able to judge of the boy's situa-

tion. Her mother is decidedly opposed to recalling her upon an uncertainty."

"Very well, sir."

Cousin Clarice was listening over the balustrade in the upper hall, and felt personally aggrieved at his polite resignation.

Thorne came home early to tea, and found that Willie had been removed to the front room, opposite his—Miriam's chamber. He had slept in Mrs. Hartley's apartment since his aunt's departure. This change was made at Mrs. Fry's instigation. The room was cooler at night, she alleged, than those in the back of the house, and she imagined that Willie would feel more at home in his own bed, surrounded by the familiar furniture.

Dr. Stanton and Mrs. Hartley had the first watch—until one o'clock; then Thorne, who had not retired that night, and Mrs. Fry, who had lain down for a few hours upon the sofa in the study, took their places. Dr. Stanton's shake of the head replied to the inquiring eye of his successor, and each sighed in exchanging a sympathizing grasp of the hand. With heart too heavy for speech, Thorne leaned upon the foot-board of the little tent-bed, and prayed for the life of the child—and, with groanings of spirit, for the loving foster-mother, miles away, whose dearest treasure was trembling in the balance. If the blow must fall, he yet supplicated that the vital fire might not go out until she had once again kissed his living lips—had caught one more ray of love from living eyes.

Willie dozed almost constantly; his starts and exclamations were less frequent; the fever was subsiding—"into what degree of exhaustion?" the watchers asked one another in whispers, once and again, during the single hour when they had the vigil to themselves. At two o'clock, Dr. Stanton re-entered, and could not be induced to quit the

apartment afterward. Mrs. Hartley resumed her station at sunrise; and, a little later, Cousin Clarice glided into the chamber.

The child was sleeping; but she could not repress a start and interjection, upon approaching the bed. The fever-flush had burned out into ashes—snowy white upon brow and cheek, gray beneath the closed eyes and about the mouth. Mrs. Hartley was weeping silently; Dr. Stanton sat beside the pillow, one hand upon the boy's pulse, the other supporting his forehead. He looked up, at his niece's voice. There were tears upon his face, and his features worked in mingled distress and sternness as he addressed her:

"Clarice! we were wrong to delay sending for that poor girl! She ought to be here! This will break her heart!"

"Is he—" she hesitated to put the direct question.

"There has been a terribly sudden change! She will be too late!"

His white head sank upon the bed. Thorne touched him, and, without speaking, gave him a paper.

"God bless you!" the old gentleman fairly sobbed, dropping the letter to wring Neale's hand. "By His help, we will keep life in him until then!"

Cousin Clarice picked up the paper, passed it to Mrs. Hartley, and read it over her shoulder. It was a telegraphic dispatch, dated

"F——, Six o'clock, P. M. Tuesday."

"Rev. Neale C. Thorne—Miss Hartley will be at home to-morrow, at nine, A. M. MAXWELL WILDE."

It seems incredible that at such a moment, and for such a cause, a feeling of chagrin over foiled schemes should find a lodgment in a woman's breast; but Cousin Clarice evinced by her eye and accent, in returning the telegram to the owner, that she disapproved of the liberty he had taken.

"I hope the result may show that you have acted judiciously, Mr. Thorne!"

The covert admonition was conveyed in the most cautious of her consummate sub-tones, and Mrs. Fry alone overheard it. While Thorne loftily ignored the remark and its author, the spirited little matron turned upon the speaker a lightning-glance that ought to have scorched her conscience and heart into sentiency.

Stimulants were ready with which the dim flame of vitality was to be fed so long as the child could receive them. He was aroused from his slumber to swallow the first, and, for a minute, stared about him with the confused air of one who strives to rally thought and recollection. Then, the beautiful eyes cleared; his own sweet smile curved the lips; he lifted his weak hand to touch Neale's cheek, as he tenderly laid him back upon the pillow.

"The dear Saviour said to her—'I say unto you, Arise!'"

The faint, but distinctly-uttered sentence thrilled the heart of every listener. Mrs. Hartley sank into a chair, where Willie could not see her, and wept abundantly. Tears rushed from Mrs. Fry's eyes, and she, too, drew back to hide her emotion from the dying boy. Neale maintained his composure, with the less effort, because he instantly connected this link of coherent thought with the chain that had parted while he held Willie in his arms, on the evening of the seizure. The last ray of Reason had rested upon his face, as he told the story of the ruler's daughter, and returning from her wayward flight, she had settled upon the spot whence she had taken wing.

"Willie knows how much the dear Saviour loves little children—does he not?" asked the Pastor, gently; "how He took them in his arms and blessed them, and promised them a place very near His Father, in their lovely home in Heaven. You are sick, dear child,"—he added, seeing him

try to move, and look about him in alarm. "You are too weak to get up. Lie quietly, and think of the blessed things this Redeemer will give to those who love Him. He is here, although you cannot see Him. He loves his little sick boy, and by and by He will make him well and happy—*very* happy! Only have patience!"

Willie appeared to obey, literally. A placid expression overspread his features; the blue-veined lids fell in meditation, that was soon sleep. When next awakened, he asked the question all were dreading to hear.

"Where is Milly?"

"She will be here presently, darling," said Mrs. Hartley.

His eyes dwelt wonderingly, wistfully, upon her tear-furrowed countenance, and a grieved quiver stirred his mouth.

"Mamma! what is the matter? Is Milly sick? Mr. Thorne! tell me—is there any thing the matter with Milly?"

"No, dear. She is not here just now, but she will be with you in a little while."

A little while! The hopeful phrase was contradicted by every heavily-passing minute. It was easier to wait while Willie remained drowsy, and only spoke when the cordials were administered. But about eight o'clock, these had quickened the sluggish, shallow stream in heart and veins, into warmth and motion. His voice had almost its original strength, and he was disposed to talk constantly. The change deceived none of those who watched him. On the contrary, it excited their fears lest the feeble strand, binding the spirit to the body, should be frayed to premature breaking by this unnatural animation. It was Thorne who retained most power to manage and satisfy him; he who soothed his increasing restlessness and desire for a change of position, by taking him in his arms, walking up and down the chamber, the pale, sweet face cradled upon his bosom, singing to him the hymns he loved best to hear; meeting

his wants and inquiries by simple stories of the Saviour's loving-kindness, and promises of the speedy coming of her with whose soul that of the child was so closely interwoven.

Mr. Fry was to meet Miriam at the Dépôt, and bring her home; but when the long-expected, prayed-for sound of carriage-wheels reached the sick-room, there passed a hasty word from one to another, urging the need of further preparation than that which he had been commissioned to perform. Thorne did not know who sent him down-stairs on this errand—only that he was entreated to go. He met, upon the lower stair, a hurrying figure, pallid as the one lying in the chamber above—whose eyes of wild, questioning agony haunted his dreams, for years afterward. He caught her cold hands as she would have rushed past him. The sight of her woe, dumb and desperate, manned him with power to control her. He even smiled, in holding her fast—a gleam of pity, love, comfort.

"He is quite sensible—very peaceful, now—very happy!" he said. "You will not forget that this holy quiet will be changed to sorrow, if he sees that you are suffering? For his sake—can you be calm?"

"I can! I am!"

A strong tremor went over her;—a life-time of conflict, compressed into a second; and from the mortal struggle, the Will arose victorious.

"I see that I can trust you!" He was leading her up the staircase. "So far as you can, look and act like your usual self. Stay! step into my room and take off your bonnet. He will notice every particular of your appearance and expression. I will go in and tell him that you have come."

Mrs. Fry had great confidence in Miriam's sense and firmness, yet she was amazed at seeing her enter, her apparel and hair in perfect order; her step unhurried; her face

colorless as marble, but as still. Willie was propped up in bed, facing the door, his eyes beaming with joy—happiness, speechless and ecstatic. Without a word, she went straight to him; folded her arms about him, and laid her cheek to his.

In the touching words of Scripture—"He sat upon her knees until noon, and then he died." They told her to lay him upon the bed, as the signs of the closing struggle came on. She obeyed, kneeling beside him; still clasping the hand that had clung to hers from his babyhood; still murmuring the love-words, that had nourished his being, from the moment in which he first learned to search human eyes, and listen to human voice, for the affection which is the heart-food of humanity; nay, more—she could still—when he gasped out the request for his accustomed lullaby, remembering—dear child! its potency to quell his nervousness, in former days, amid the unrest that possessed him now—she had yet the strength to sing it, softly, clearly through; and with a smile, more mournful than tears, give him the "good-night" kiss his lips tried to form, as he felt the near approach of the chill gloom of Death. Then a spasm—sharp—but mercifully brief;—he struggled to arise;—the little arms were tossed aloft, as feeling in the darkness,—

"Milly! Milly!"

Oh, loving and loyal heart! loyal to the end!

They laid him down——

CHAPTER XX.

"BE PITIFUL, O GOD!"

My story has gone from me! Plot and actors are swept into the outer darkness, leaving but one fixed island of thought, surrounded by a solemn sea of silence—that little bed, with the kneeling form beside it, and the still, breathless shape upon it; the white lids sealed fast, and the smile, whose very sweetness awes the beholder, frozen upon the face.

"O God! to hold those fingers close,
And yet to feel so lonely!
To see a light on dearest brows,
That is the daylight only!
Be pitiful, O God!"

I say it over and over, in the unutterable pain of that heart-ache, whose expression is ever incoherent; moan it to the blank midnight—the helpless sob, that so many other silent nights have heard from other souls, wrung by like scenes and memories as vivid.

"Be pitiful, O God!"

And when we have said it, we lay our mouths in the dust!

It is a blessed change for the child, we are told. Kind voices bid us remember that those lips will never again writhe—those eyes never turn in wistful, imploring terror to us, for help in the fierce pangs of bodily anguish; and we thank the Chastener, in softer weeping, that this is so. But we do not forget the days when the babe was not sick; —we remember that the merry, affectionate prattle, and the

quick, dancing rays of joy and love are also gone forever. Gone, the musical ring of child-laughter; the welcome patter of baby-feet; the clinging caress of baby-arms; the pure shower of baby-kisses! The limbs we delighted to bathe and clothe, as we marked day by day, their development into symmetry and strength, are dressed by other hands for their long sleep; we hang for the last time over the waxen image—so like the life we recollect, even while we say to ourselves that the living child is not here, but far away in safety and blessedness; we call, in fondest tones, the pet name that is to be hereafter ownerless; we see the daylight shut out from that brow, and with it, the last ray of earthly solace from our souls; the cruel, hasty clods heaped high and fast upon the sacred casket, and the tiny swell of earth grow into the fearful familiar form above it. Looking up at the sky, we marvel that it is cloudless; at the earth, that it is gay; most wonderingly into the faces of our fellow-creatures—a dull aching surprise that they smile in meeting us, and never seem to think of the fresh little grave in the cemetery over yonder—and the undisciplined heart shrieks out its prayer—

"Be pitiful! O God!"

But this is not bereavement! It is not in mortal nature fully to comprehend a loss so recent and so great. It is true that our imperfect realization of it is as much as we can bear at the time—but there are nerves numbed by the shock, that will awaken into keener perception and intensity of suffering as the truth is daily pressed nearer to our hearts. Nearer and deeper! for there is less show of sorrow upon the surface-life. We have learned to accept it as a part of our existence. We hardly remember what we were before it fell upon us—it seems so long ago, and our separation from that Past so complete. We could forget or shake off trouble, in those days; *this* abides with us, walks with us through the

duties of the day, sits with us through the pitiful mockery we call pleasure and recreation; lies down with us at night; arouses us, during the dark hours, by a tiger-like clutch upon the heart, and defies us to forget its presence in the dreamless slumber, so needful for the worn body and shattered nerves. Holding our eyes waking, it forces us to hearken, with aching ears and bated respiration, for the soft, regular breathing to which we were wont to listen, with smiling content, when our sleep was broken in that Long ago; cheats us into putting out a hand to feel for the crib or cradle, we yet know stands empty and useless in the deserted nursery up-stairs;—and then, by a swift pitiless transition, brings up the picture of that lonely mound—Oh, so small to be left there all alone! green beneath the summer heavens, washed by autumn storms or glazed with wintry sleet.

"Be pitiful, O God!"

It is an easy thing, ye unbereaved ones, who preach of resignation and decry rebellious mourning. Is it an easy thing, think you, to learn to live without our dead? to live, when so much of life itself is buried from sight and touch; to hope, when hopes—the fairest, and sweetest, are crumbling into dust; to heal our torn hearts into forgetfulness, when we cannot move from room to room, without seeing some memento of the lost; when every innocent glance from a child's eye, each shout of childish mirth, that floats in at our windows, reopens the wound; when, as succeeding years bring around the anniversary of our mighty grief, we say: "He would have been such and such an age by this time—a great help and comfort to us"—and then our lips are white and dumb, in sorrow for the manly lad, the stalwart youth, as well as for the golden-haired boy we buried ten, fifteen, twenty years ago.

"Be pitiful, O God!"

Yet are we His beloved ones, His chosen children, although He smite us; although he has appointed us to walk in the shadow of these little graves; and while the depth of gloom may be like that among the dark mountains, and we be ready to stumble and fall by the way, we may yet discern, and not very far on, the voice of the Shepherd, alluring us to follow Him as he gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them in His bosom. Still in the homes of earth, the ear of faith may hear the divine "Talitha-Cumi" spoken above the beds of our dead babes—for as a *father pitieth his children*, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.

CHAPTER XXI.

WILL-MAKING.

The only hour of daylight which Dr. Stanton claimed as his own exclusive property, of which he allowed nothing except a summons of the most urgent nature to defraud him, was that immediately succeeding dinner. For forty years he had smoked his "digestive pipe," as he termed it, at this season—upon the piazza, in mild weather, on stormy or winter days, in his study. Thorne was a moderate smoker; his palate, unblunted by excessive or indiscriminate indulgence, was sensitive to the flavor of a fine cigar, and if such were not to be had, his practice was total abstinence. He brought to the habit, which only gross abuse converts into a vice, a sort of poetic refinement that made it a graceful and becoming luxury.

He walked into the library, one bleak November afternoon, at the hour when he knew his society would be most acceptable to his host, holding in his hand a box of cigars, which he had just opened.

"A present from Mr. Lee!" he said, smiling. "I found them upon my study table this morning, with his card. His recommendation is the best brand they could have. They are models of their kind."

He drew out a handful of them—dark and rich in hue, taper in form, velvet smooth to the touch, fragrant in odor—and passed them to the Doctor for inspection.

"They are very fine," pronounced the latter.

"For once, slight the pipe, and try one of them," urged Thorne.

The Doctor shook his head. He used only the leaf-tobacco, as it was cured upon the plantations, and would have relished a superfine factory article as little as he would have done a French ragoût.

"I am too old to learn," he said, taking down his pipe and box from the mantel.

Thorne chose a lighter from a vase which Miriam kept constantly supplied, ignited it at the fire, and handed it to his companion; then lighted his cigar and settled himself in his accustomed corner, opposite Dr. Stanton's great leather-covered chair. For some moments, he enjoyed without speaking, the flavor and sight of the exquisite incense ascending in blue rings above his head. He had worked hard all the forenoon, and his brain was glad to recreate itself by this half-lazy, half-meditative mood. Dr. Stanton likewise seemed indisposed to commence the conversation; but his brow was bent in severer thought than his young friend's; there was a troubled, yet earnest look in the eyes fixed upon his brown-coated familiar—the pipe, whose round red eye seemed to wink back answers to his cogitations.

"Mr. Thorne!" he said, at last. "I have been wanting to consult you upon a subject that has occasioned me much thought and considerable perplexity, of late."

The tenor of this preamble was not so uncommon as to startle the hearer. Since their affliction in September, he had been considered and treated, in all respects, as one of the family; his opinion asked and advice sought upon whatever subject came up for family debate, whether it were trivial or important in its character. It could not therefore escape Dr. Stanton's notice that, despite his youth, the man's judgment was ripe, and his counsel sound, and there were

not many smoking hours in which some knotty point of theology, politics, or even medicine, was not brought forward and discussed.

"Very well, sir; I shall be happy to listen."

The Doctor's next remark called up a smile to his hearer's face.

"Have you ever made your will, Mr. Thorne?"

"Never, sir. I have nothing, or next to nothing, to bequeath, except my library, which my sisters would parcel out as they liked. I am not troubled by fears of litigation over my estate."

"But, if you were a man of family, would you not view the case differently?"

Neale was very serious; a gravity that attested the pressure of some sad association—it was so different from the hopeful aspect one would have looked for at this suggestion in a man of his age and disposition.

"Perhaps I should; provided, always, that I had any property to be divided."

"It would be your duty, sir! I have seen too much unhappiness arise from negligence in this regard, to doubt the wisdom of a definite and circumstantial will. It may sound amusing to you, upon the first hearing, when I say that I have executed no less than six instruments of this description in the course of my life; but their history is a sorrowful one. I made my will upon my wedding day, bestowing every thing I had upon my wife, in case she outlived me. I drew up another, while my fourth and youngest child was still an infant. The provisions of this one were amended twice, in consequence of deaths in my family. When my daughter, Mrs. Hartley, was the sole survivor of the four—and she a widow—I wrote a fifth, settling the estate upon her and her two children. For ten years, this lay in my drawer—the seal unbroken. Then—"

He paused, in reluctance to proceed, or doubt how best to express the cause of the next change. Thorne forbore to look toward him, surmising that the revelation he hesitated to make referred to the dark period in the annals of the household, that had furnished the staple of Cousin Clarice's tragic tale to his sister, and concerning which the rest of the kindred were singularly reticent.

—"Then, certain unfortunate circumstances—you may have heard whispers of their nature—certain lamentable occurrences made it my imperative duty to rewrite the whole document—as I earnestly hoped, for the last time. Now, in my seventy-first year, I must narrow down the already small list of legatees; record the sad fact that I have no son to keep alive my name, or even my race, upon the earth."

He wheeled his chair toward a desk, unlocked a drawer, and took from it a sealed packet. This he opened, ran his eye over its contents, and handed it to Thorne, without comment. It devised equal portions of the property to Mrs. Hartley, Miriam, and Willie. There was a handsome bequest to his niece, Clarice Stanton; and another, yet more liberal in amount, to William Bent. Upon the words that accompanied the latter gift, Thorne dwelt with profound and painful interest:

"Not as a compensation for his heroic fidelity to my family, and the injuries he has sustained thereby, but as a token of my appreciation of his services and sacrifices in behalf of me and mine, and my affectionate esteem for his character and person, I hereby give and bequeath unto the said William Bent, his heirs and assigns, forever," etc.

Could he, who was thought to be worthy of this honorable mention, have been the gambler and thief, the midnight assassin, the profligate trifler with the grand-daughter's affections, that Cousin Clarice had depicted? Mere perversity of opinion upon the question of his innocence of the charges

of burglary and attempt to kill would never have led a clear-headed, conscientious man like Dr. Stanton to register a solemn affidavit of the unblemished character and valuable services of the accused. He was neither obstinate nor whimsical, but one who tested well a sentiment or principle before adopting it. Why, since this mysterious Bent retained his stand in the parent's heart and esteem, was he refused the hand of his betrothed? why exiled from the house and neighborhood? what prevented his recall now?

It was not idle curiosity that emboldened the reader to press upon the sore spot he had heretofore avoided.

"Do you know where Mr. Bent is, at present, sir?"

"I do not. I have serious fears that he is no longer living, although in this belief I am not supported by the convictions of other members of my family."

"Ah! love like *hers* is very hopeful," thought Neale, sadly.

"He left this part of the country smarting under a sense of injustice, and the weight of a false accusation, disproved in a legal court; yet, as he imagined, discredited by the community. He was a noble, high-minded boy, spirited and ambitious, but sensitive to a fault. His affections were strong; his constancy—I had almost said—superhuman. I loved the lad! how well, I never knew rightly until he was gone. We had several letters from him during the first two years of his absence, written from different points. We judged from these erratic movements that he had no settled home or occupation; but his accounts of himself were vague and reserved. His last letter was couched in hopeful terms. It was addressed to Miriam, and contained an assurance that she should yet hear from him with honor. Several months passed before we had another line of intelligence of his location or welfare. Then I received a communication from a stranger in New York City, setting forth the sad case of a sick man in the hotel where he was stay-

ing, who called himself William Bent, and named me as his nearest friend. He was ill, and without funds, and had begged this chance acquaintance to write to me and request a loan which he would repay so soon as he was able to collect the necessary amount. The letter came at an unfortunate time—while my daughter lay dangerously ill—or I would have gone in person to New York. Since this could not be, I wrote immediately, enclosing double the sum required and entreating the poor fellow to return to us. This was a year and a half ago, and from that time we have heard nothing. Yet he may be alive. It is very likely that he has been unsuccessful in his enterprise, whatever it was, for he wore his heart upon his sleeve to those whom he loved, and would be an easy prey to the designing—but my faith in his integrity remains unshaken."

Neale could not marvel at Miriam's constancy to one who had inspired her grandfather with a love romantic in its fervor and trust. The old gentleman's pipe had remained untouched so long, that it had gone out. Now that he had touched the tabooed subject, he seemed unable to quit it. Yet it evidently agitated him deeply. His hands, ordinarily steady as those of middle age, shook, in refolding the will, until the paper rattled, and his voice had a melancholy quaver that contrasted strangely with its usual sonorous tones. Neale fancied that he grew visibly older and more infirm, with each minute.

"My conscience is not quite easy as respects some portions of my conduct to that unhappy, generous boy, sir. I fear sometimes, Mr. Thorne, that my love for my family, my glory in the stainless character borne by my father, and jealousy for my reputation, and that of my descendants, has been my besetting sin—in one instance, if no more, a grievous temptation to error. Yet Heaven knows that I only acquiesced in his proposal, little dreaming what the self-sac-

rificing plan would cost him in the end. I would undo it now, if I could, bitter as would be the humiliation to myself—but there is poor Edith! how could I break the news to her? She is as proud, in her quiet way, as I am in mine. I think the stroke would kill her. I cannot forget that she has but one child now."

Thorne had no reply ready. These self-upbraidings and untimely regrets would have presented an insoluble riddle to him, but for the key supplied by cousin Clarice's narrative. This made the confession clear as sunlight. The honest old citizen, stanch in the pride of an unsullied name—honorable in the sight of this, and past generations, had recoiled at the thought of further alliance with a family upon whose escutcheon rested an ineffaceable blot; had severed his grand-daughter's engagement with William Bent, and broken his heart. Neale's respect for Miriam was doubly strong, in recalling what she had undergone; what resigned, in obedience to the demands of filial duty—and the steadiness of her devotion to the two, who had asked this immolation of feeling at her hands. He had, moreover, the magnanimity to pity and admire the rival, who, absent, silent, and unfortunate, still held sway over the only heart he himself had ever cared to win. There was no admixture of ignoble feelings in the pain that it caused him to say finally—

"Mr. Bent may return yet, and be reinstated in public respect. The prejudices of communities, like those of individuals, often die of sheer old age."

"So I wrote to him—and Miriam did the same!" said Dr. Stanton, eagerly. "She was very sanguine—dear girl! She has never wholly relinquished the hope of winning him back, although there are times when her cheerful trust flags somewhat. She cannot understand why he would go away—why he did not stay here and live down the reproach. But she did not know all"—he stopped.

"I have wandered from the original subject, Mr. Thorne," continued he, bracing himself to an appearance of his habitual vigor and decision of language. "The death of our little boy has rendered advisable some material alterations in this instrument. I propose to have a new will prepared, halving the bulk of the estate between Mrs. Hartley and her daughter, with the proviso, that in the event of William Bent's having died unmarried, his share shall return to my natural heirs. Would it be asking too great a favor of you to request you to sketch this outline for me?"

The question did not surprise his companion. He wrote rapidly and legibly, and his young, willing fingers were often employed in the service of his venerable friend, to whom penmanship was, as it is with the generality of old persons, a labor. The document was soon ready. Thorne had just concluded the clause which appointed Mr. Fry the executor, when an interruption came.

"There's a man waiting to see you, sir," said Parker, at the door.

"Who is it?"

"One of Mr. Mills's people, sir. He says that Mrs. Mills has had another 'stressing attack, and wants you right off."

"Say that I will be there in half an hour without fail. Is the carriage ready?"

"Almost, sir!"

"Very well. You can go."

Parker vanished.

"As to this," resumed the Doctor, fingering the old envelope irresolutely, "I may as well keep it until the other is ready. I will call at Fry's office as I come home; if I can, I will bring him up with me this evening, and have the will duly signed and attested. Delays are dangerous at my time of life." He tossed the packet into the drawer and shut it up. "Now I must be off! I am always afraid that

that poor lady will die in one of these turns, some day, before I can get to her. Ah! thank you!"

Thorne had brought his great coat from the hall, and now held it for him to put on. He regularly performed these little son-like offices, when Miriam was not by to forestall him.

"It is a queer case—a combination of asthma and liver complaint, I'm afraid," said the Doctor, slipping one arm into its sleeve. "Sometimes the paroxysms are fearful—" he thrust in the other. "It is a sad thing! She is a young woman still—just half my age. That doesn't seem very youthful to you, at twenty-five, but when you have nearly trebled that, you will regard a matron of thirty-five as quite a girl!"

"I do not flatter myself that my old age will be as hale as yours, my dear sir. You are one in a thousand."

The Doctor laughed, straightened his robust form, and slapped his broad chest.

"My heart and lungs are all right, certainly. But my neck is a trifle too thick, and my blood has a disposition to rise in the world. It wouldn't do for me to run a race or fly into a passion." He rummaged his pockets for his gloves. "Have you seen my—ah! here they are!"

They lay upon the secretary from which he had taken the will. The finger of one of them was caught in the drawer, and he pulled this open to release it. It was the merest accident—just such a casual trifle as is every day deciding the destiny of men, and of nations.

"Upon the whole—where is the use of leaving this here?" he said, again picking up the envelope. If the other is never completed, the law makes a better will than this one."

Neale started forward to stay the action, but the paper was already in the hottest blaze of the roaring fire.

"It may be best!" he reflected, smothering the interjection of regret.

The Doctor was gazing down into the drawer, which was nearly full of papers.

"This is a singular coincidence! The topmost letter here is the very one I was telling you of, a while ago—that from New York—from poor Willie's stranger friend—Austin, I think, was his name. Yes! here it is—Henry H. Austin."

"Let me see it! It seems to me that I have heard that name somewhere," said Neale, interested. "'Dear Sir—I arrived in this city some days since, from the South.' I am very much mistaken if I have not a letter from this identical gentleman among *my* papers—or, more properly speaking, among those of a deceased college mate, whose executor I became. It was a begging letter, too; but Mr. Austin wanted money for himself, then. What if this appeal to you were a 'confidence game!'" exclaimed he, impetuously, as the suspicion crossed his mind.

"It cannot be!" said Dr. Stanton, positively. "There is not such a villain in creation!"

"If there is one, there are two!" thought Thorne, by no means so firm in his belief of William Bent's integrity as was his old friend.

But the Doctor was so shocked by his former supposition that he refrained from expressing this misgiving.

"We can ascertain whether the letters are from one and the same person, at all events," he added, almost sorry that he had said any thing about the affair. "To the best of my knowledge, my classmate's correspondent was a rascal. He fleeced the poor fellow out of every thing he had upon earth—literally starved him to death. I will tell you the particulars some day. It was the saddest story I ever knew."

"I should like to compare the two letters," replied Dr. Stanton, "unless you object to showing me yours."

"Not at all! I will bring it down, and you can examine it as you ride along. I see that you are in a hurry."

"If you please, sir! My carriage should be ready by this time."

Thorne went up stairs, three steps at a bound, and dived hastily into a trunk where he kept the box of papers so strangely committed to his charge. There were not many, and he was not long in finding one post-marked "Mobile." A glimpse of the contents produced a feeling of commingled disappointment and pleasure. There had been in his mind an indistinct fancy that he was on the eve of gaining some clue to the dark mystery of the January night, three years agone, while he dreaded being the means of convincing Dr. Stanton that he had been the dupe of a cunningly-contrived imposture. The chirography of the yellowing sheet he now held was in no respect like that he had examined in the study. The letter to Hosmer was written in a bold, dashing hand, marked in character, and scholarly in execution. That to Dr. Stanton was an unpractised scrawl in comparison, although the two bore the same signature. But he was detaining the Doctor from his errand of mercy. He put the epistle back in its cover, and ran down.

There had been an arrival while he was in his room—a couple of gentlemen to call upon him with a request from some charitable society for a speech at an approaching celebration. Dr. Stanton was meeting them in the hall as Neale descended.

"You will excuse my abrupt departure, gentlemen," he said. "I have had a peremptory call to the country. I leave you in good hands."

Thorne followed him to the door, and gave him the letter.

"You will learn nothing from it. They were not written by the same man; but you can read it at your leisure."

The Doctor tucked it into the breast pocket of his overcoat, got nimbly into his buggy, and drove off.

"A remarkable man for his years!" observed one of the visitors.

"He is!" assented Thorne. "It may be said of him, as truly as it was of Moses, 'His eye is not dim, nor his natural force abated.' So far as man can judge, he may be spared to the community for twenty years to come."

The Committee lingered and talked until the pale winter day languished into a cheerless twilight. Thorne had received them in the parlor, and when he had seen them off, returned instead, to the more cozy library. He had not come hither with the expectation of meeting Miriam, yet she was there—not studying the fire-pictures, as he had found her on the "Aurora Leigh afternoon," but standing at the window, gazing out upon the frozen sky and desolate landscape.

"It is growing colder every moment!" said Thorne, rubbing his hands before the ruddy blaze.

"Is it?" she asked, without changing her position. "I am sorry Grandpapa was obliged to leave home in such weather."

"He will not suffer, I think. He is well wrapped up—or *was*. He must have reached Mr. Mills' by this time."

"I hope so!"

She spoke in an unvarying, passionless tone, and there the conversation rested.

Neale surveyed her from his seat, without her suspecting his scrutiny. She looked slighter than ever in her deep mourning dress, and paler. He had only a profile view of her face, but in this the ravages of sorrow were sufficiently perceptible. Her cheek was thinner; her eye dark and sunken; her lip had exchanged its spirited curve for a harder, straighter line, that told of self-command, continual and stern. If she ever gave way under the weight of her sorrow, it was in secret. Thorne sometimes wondered,

sometimes trembled at her composure. For a week after Willie's death, she had secluded herself within her chamber, and there in solitude and with soul-wrestlings no mortal looked upon, had met and borne the most poignant pangs—the sharpest, although not the heaviest, strokes of chastisement. Then she came forth, calm and tearless; full of ruth for others; asking no indulgence for herself; patient, watchful, diligent in every department of duty;—virtues, in whose practice she had never relaxed, in the sight of others, unto the present time. Thorne had loved her before, with all the warmth of his earnest, ardent nature; that love, hopeless though he believed it to be, was augmented and elevated by reverential compassion. She did not refuse his sympathy; she listened to his words of comfort as to the consolations of a friend and pastor; thanking him for them, in gentle humility, and asking that his prayers might accompany hers in her request for power to endure without complaint, and to labor without fainting. The impulsive, thoughtless freedom of the girl was gone; action had taken the place of dreaming. The suffering that a common-place woman would have cast in some degree upon her friends, by drafts upon their sympathies and time, and in part, wept away in plentiful tears, she bore for, and within herself. It ennobled and purified her, but the fire was too fierce for the bodily frame.

This evening she was very weary, and moreover, oppressed by a burden of despondency that taxed her utmost strength. Yet a few signs of physical exhaustion were all that could have betrayed her state to any but a lover's eye. *He* comprehended the intensity of her anguish; the might of her self-control; he would thankfully have assumed the woe for the privilege of relieving her. Ten years of life would, in his estimation, have purchased too cheaply the right to lay that tired head upon his bosom, to sustain in his arms the form ready to sink with fatigue; to breathe such words of

love and tenderness and pity in her ear, as should draw forth, in grateful measure, the tears that, suppressed, hindered the heart's healthful pulsations. But he might not! He could only watch and pray for her, afar off. He would not leave her, however, little as she appeared to heed his presence.

From that window, one had, when other trees were leafless, a distant view of the tall cedars in the burying-ground, and, gleaming white amid their dark foliage, the marble shaft marking the spot where lay Mrs. Stanton, with all her children, save one, clustered about her; a vacant space at her left side for her husband, and, some yards farther off, a grave, shorter than hers or her son's, with a simpler headstone—"Amelia, wife of Henry Hartley, aged 21." Close to this, so near, it appeared to nestle under its shadow—was another, yet smaller, the turf crisp and sere; the flowers, laid over the heart of the dreamless sleeper, but a few hours before, already blighted by the biting black frost. There were always blossoms upon that little hillock.

Neale saw the place as plainly as if he were standing within the enclosure—sitting there by the fire, watching Miriam, and listening to the low wail of the wind wandering around the house. Its moan took words to his imagination—the passionate cry, that had rent his heart, while he stooped to close the dead child's eyes—the only lament he had heard from her lips.——

"Oh, my boy! my boy!"

He knew that her soul was repeating it now; that the fast-locked fingers were bloodless from the effort it caused her to keep down the wildly sorrowful plaint. She did not move until the fire-light made the outer obscurity impervious to the vision.

"You think Grandpapa will certainly return to supper?" she asked, approaching the hearth.

"I do—unless Mrs. Mills' attack should prove to be unusually obstinate and dangerous."

"I wish he would discontinue his practice. He is too old for such active exertion. Yet I do not know that it would be best, that is, happiest, for him to lead a life of leisure. I wish *I* had a profession!"

The sentence seemed to escape her involuntarily. She leaned her head against the mantel, her eyes fixed upon the fire.

"You have!" replied Thorne gently. "You are the hope, the comfort, the light of the household. You make this a home for your mother and grandfather. The privileges and responsibilities of your station are great."

"I hope I may be—I trust that I afford some comfort; but"—she paused, and forced a smile that seemed ready to tremble into tears—"I was about to say, that the light within me is darkness."

Thorne answered, musingly:

> "'And they, the young, who long to prove
> By daring deed, by lofty lot,
> How free from earth their grateful love
> Can spring without a taint or spot;—
> Often such youthful heart is given
> The path of grief, to walk to Heaven,—
> For God, through ways they have not known,
> Will lead his own.'

Not may—but *will* lead his own."

The lines in her face were softer. "My poor Grandfather!" was her next remark. "What an incomprehensible page would be the record of his life, were it not for 'the world that sets this right!' In many cases—in mine, for example, I can perceive the need of the chastening; but it is more difficult to recognize the merciful intent of the storm that bows the head of the grain already ripe for the garner."

"The Great Teacher often appoints to us tasks as arduous. Have you never noticed, however, that those at which we stumble most are exhibited in the lives of others—not our own? If you were to ask your Grandfather, why the Lord had dealt thus heavily with him, in leaving his homestead almost desolate, while in so many of his neighbors' houses, the fire-side circle is still unbroken, he would tell you that not one useless blow had fallen upon him; that each grief had entered his soul, hand in hand with a blessing."

He had arisen, seeing that she did not mean to be seated, and faced her across the red hearth-stone, also resting his arm on the mantel.

"'The world that sets this right!'" he repeated, and there was a sweet, solemn cadence in his voice—the one sound in the still room and hour. "I like that phrase! Oh! the full satisfaction—the pleased amaze—the humble gratitude, we shall feel, when, our feet safely planted upon the eternal shores, God's providences shall be demonstrated to have been only wise, only good, only loving from the beginning to the end of our lives! Shall I tell you what is to me one of the richest bundles of promise in the Bible? 'What I do, thou knowest not now, *but thou shalt know hereafter!*' We are required to exercise a blind trust but for a little while—during the infancy of the soul. Then—knowledge, assurance, praise forever and forever!"

"Amen!" uttered Miriam, lowly.

"My daughter!" said Mrs. Hartley, dissolving by her entrance, the spell of silence that had thralled the occupants of the apartment, after the last word recorded. "Why have you not lighted the lamp?"

"Here comes Parker to do it, now," rejoined Miriam. "Does it snow?" she inquired of the butler, as he performed this office.

"No, ma'am, it's too cold. We will have sleet, before long, according to my reckoning."

Miriam looked uneasy. "We will wait supper for Grandpapa—will we not, Mamma?"

"I would prefer it, my dear. But Mr. Thorne! You may have some engagement for the evening, sir?"

"None, Madam. I shall enjoy the meal far more with the Doctor at the foot of the table."

Mrs. Hartley established herself by the lamp with her work. Thorne set his chair nearer to her, and commenced a conversation upon general topics. There was no jar in their intercourse, now that Cousin Clarice had gone. They talked, to-night, like parent and son. The delay which her mother took so easily irked Miriam unaccountably. She had her sewing, but she worked irregularly, often glancing toward the window, listening to the rising wind, and starting nervously at every sound from without. Yet she gave no audible sound of impatience or solicitude, and Mrs. Hartley remained serenely unconscious of her restlessness. At length, the daughter put aside her work and arose. Her mother looked up.

"What is it, dear?"

"I am going to get Grandpapa's gown and slippers ready."

She arranged them upon and in front of the large easy chair. Both wrapper and slippers were of her manufacture, warmly wadded and comfortable in fit; the colors bright and tastefully contrasted. She handled them with unwonted care, even with tenderness—and when they were finally disposed according to her fancy, stood gazing at them, as trying to think of something else to be done for the ease and pleasure of the absentee. Neale lost no part of this pantomime, while seeming to see nothing, except his hostess. His face was toward the door; which was behind Mrs. Hart-

ley, and at Miriam's right hand, and he alone had a distinct view of Parker's features, when he showed himself an instant, to say—

"Mr. Thorne, if you please, sir, there's a person would like to speak with you, for a moment."

He looked so wild and scared, that Thorne instantly obeyed the summons. Parker was waiting in the hall—his complexion a tawny gray with alarm.

"'Twas I wanted to say a word to you, sir. I hope there's nothing the matter—but Mr. Mills' David has been over again, in a mighty hurry, to say that his mistress is getting worse and worse, and that Marster has never been there at all, this evening."

"What! when did the man leave home?"

"Not more'n a half-hour ago, sir. He rid over as fast as his horse could gallop, and says his orders are to call for Dr. Wharton on his way back, if so be, Dr. Stanton couldn't come. You know, sir, Mr. Thorne, 'taint like Marster not to go direct, after he starts for any place."

"He left home at half-past four," said Neale, consulting his watch. It was now after eight. "Is Reuben at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell him to bring my horse around, and one for himself, as soon as possible. Let Mr. Mills' man ride on for Dr. Wharton. Do not tell him or the other servants that you are uneasy, or why I am going out. *Especially* I charge you to see that Mrs. Hartley and Miss Miriam do not suspect that there is any thing wrong. Now, bring in supper, just as usual. I depend upon you!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SEARCH.

THORNE did not dare to catch Miriam's eye upon his return to the study.

"Mrs. Hartley," he said, "may I trouble you to give me a cup of coffee, before I ride? I am going to Mr. Mills'. A servant has just been sent over to say that Mrs. Mills is much worse. I do not think the Doctor will be home to supper."

"Is she dying?" inquired Mrs. Hartley, anxiously.

"I do not know, Madam. The servant called by, for an instant, on his way to Dr. Wharton's."

"Grandpapa has little hope of her recovery, if he has sent for a consulting physician," said Miriam. "Did *he* send for you, too?"

"There was no formal message sent to me; but it is none the less my duty to go when any member of my flock is in danger."

He was thankful to Parker for his summons to the supper-table. He could not have kept up a deception, justifiable as this was, many minutes, if she were the questioner. His conscience felt a twinge as she applied the clause relating to her grandparent's danger, to the sick woman—but so it must be, until certainty, sad or joyful, supplanted suspense. He drank his coffee in haste, having ordered Parker, meantime, to fill and trim a small dark lantern, with a powerful reflector, which he brought from his room. This proceed-

ing excited no inquiry. The night was cloudy, and his route a rough country road.

Mrs. Hartley called him back, after he reached the hall.

"Mr. Thorne! you will bring father home with you—will you not? He ought not to sit up all night; and if Dr. Wharton is there, it cannot be necessary."

"I will bring him, madam, if I return myself!"

Miriam's eyes sought his, searchingly. "You know of nothing besides Mrs. Mills' danger that is likely to keep you out late—do you?"

"I confidently hope to see you again in two or three hours," he responded cheerfully. "Until then—good-night!"

"Your horse picked up a stone in his foot to-day, sir, and limps some," said Reuben, at the gate. "So I had to saddle Frisk instead. Miss Mir'um won't care."

"She would not if she knew upon what errand I am bound!" answered Thorne, mentally, throwing himself into the saddle.

He experienced a sense of greater hopefulness, accepted, as a propitious omen, the circumstance of her horse being appointed to bear him in his pious quest. The hoofs clattered upon the earth, which was frozen hard as stone; the air was raw, yet nippingly cold; the heavens were pitchy in their blackness. Guided by their intimate knowledge of the way, they rode briskly on, leaving the lights of the town to their left, and striking off in a northerly direction. The wind whistled keenly in their teeth, and, at intervals, a stray drop of icy rain struck upon face or hand. The negro kept a little in the rear, mute and respectful, whatever were his ideas concerning the wisdom and result of their mission. Thorne was too busy with his own reflections to think of enlightening or consulting him. The failure of his venerable friend to keep an appointment in the chamber of sickness was an event whose singularity might well excite lively ap-

prehensions as to his safety. He was methodical and punctual to a proverb; and recalling the haste of his departure, his remarks upon the imminent danger to the patient from these paroxysms, unless speedy relief were afforded, and his personal interest in herself and family, Thorne could not doubt that some untoward accident had detained him from her bedside.

"Half-past four"—he computed. "He said that he would be there by five. Yet at a quarter to eight he had not arrived. What could have diverted him from his course and detained him so long?"

A chill crept through his bones by the answers proposed by his perturbed fancy—a superstitious thrill, like that he had experienced the night that James Hosmer died. This promised to be as tempestuous as that had been; for the sleet began to fall faster and sharper, and the wind roared among the naked trees, where it had sighed an hour before.

The first halt was at Mr. Mills' house. Thorne's heart beat fast at sight of the lighted windows, and his knees trembled in walking up to the door. Mr. Mills answered his knock.

"Mr. Thorne! Walk in, sir! I am very happy to see you, and so will be my wife. She is much easier. Walk in, if you please!"

"No, thank you, sir!" Neale returned, as composedly as he could. "My business out to-night is to find Dr. Stanton. We were surprised and somewhat alarmed by the report of your man that he had not been here this afternoon. Has he arrived yet?"

"He has not. Dr. Wharton is with Mrs. Mills. Her attack was very severe; the most violent she has ever had, and my anxiety was intense for a while, I can assure you. Are you certain, Mr. Thorne, that Dr. Stanton intended to come directly here?"

"There can be no doubt of it, sir. I was with him when he received your message. He set off the moment his carriage could be gotten ready. It is very strange!"

"Because"—continued Mr. Mills, whose lazy drawl irritated Thorne almost beyond endurance. "Bless me! what a draught! Do step in, sir!"

"Excuse me—I cannot! I will not keep you standing here, however. You have heard nothing of or from Dr. Stanton, then, since receiving his reply to your summons?"

"Only what Dr. Wharton said—"

Thorne was retreating toward the porch steps, but stopped at this.

"What was that?"

"Why, it seems that he—Dr. Wharton, I mean, was coming along the river road from Elktown, about five o'clock, and he saw a buggy, that he is sure was Dr. Stanton's, turn off at the fork by Yarrington's barn, and go down toward Jefferson. He noticed it particularly, because the horse was jogging along at an easy gait, and the Doctor is the fastest driver hereabouts, for his age. I hate to find fault with my family physician, Mr. Thorne—yet I must say that I felt hurt to hear that he had passed within half a mile of my door, when my wife lay dying, I may say, and he wasn't hurrying to get back, even supposing—"

Thorne interrupted him to inquire if he could see Dr. Wharton. This gentleman was very positive as to the identity of the equipage he had seen, even to the white wolf-skin robe in the foot of the carriage. He was within calling distance of the driver, but having no communication to make, had not spoken. He treated the dereliction from professional duty on the part of his brother practitioner more lightly than Thorne deemed kind or becoming.

"Men of his age are liable to grow forgetful, Mr. Thorne. I really think that your anxiety is uncalled for. Some phy-

sicians, prompt enough at other times, are negligent with these chronic cases."

"No one has ever had cause to accuse Dr. Stanton of unfaithfulness, in any branch of his profession," replied Neale, with spirit.

He saw that this hint was thrown out for Mr. Mills' benefit; but it did not suit his disposition to permit a malicious and groundless slur to go unanswered, at any time.

"I shall ride on as far as Mr. Yarrington's. If he passed there at the hour you mentioned, it is likely that some member of the family saw him."

This he found had been the case. Two ladies of the household had noticed the well-known vehicle and horse, and corroborated Dr. Wharton's statement of the direction they took at the forked roads. Again Thorne was in the saddle; pressing on now against a storm that gathered fury every minute. The stinging hail and rough gusts beat upon his face and breast, and sorely amazed poor Frisk, whose rebellious curvetings at the outset, indicative of his disapproval of the nocturnal adventure, were tamed down into sorrowful resignation to the will of the tempest and his rider. The cross-road led into a wilder and less open country than that they had hitherto traversed; and here Reuben became the guide, Thorne's visits to the region having been few and infrequent. They passed but three houses in as many miles, and their inquiries gained for them no further information beyond the rather dubious testimony of a negro, who averred that he had met Dr. Stanton, after sundown, going toward Jefferson, "poking along" to use his phrase, "as if he was asleep."

"I am afraid we have lost the track!" said Thorne, at last, reining up. "Is there no road back into which he may have turned?"

"Not that I knows on, sir."

Thorne sat still to ponder upon his future movements.

Subsequently, he considered his course, on this occasion, as the distinct leading of the Divine hand. Mr. Mills and Dr. Wharton had voted his expedition useless and Quixotic. There seemed little in the bare fact of Dr. Stanton's disappearance to justify the extreme anxiety that had taken hold of him; but the confession of this to himself did not dissipate his fears or alter his resolution. The blinding sleet, and the hoarse howl of the wind, brought up no picture of fireside comfort. Silvery locks, stiffened by the freezing rain, noble features, moveless and cold; a massive form, lying prone upon the earth, the face turned up to the black sky; —this was the vision that gave him the nerve of desperation.

"We must push on, then!" He struck Frisk with his heel.

"Stop a minute, sir, if you please! I jes' remember that I had disremembered a road half a mile back, leading to Mr. Jones' house."

"Does your master ever go there?"

"Nigh upon three times a week, sir. Mr. Jones' darter, she's mighty poorly now dese two months."

"I have not heard of it."

"They don't 'long to your church, sir; and besides, they are kinder poor white folksy, and Marster aint apt to tell on de visits he makes, whar he 'spec's no pay. But he's been good like a fader to dem Joneses. I heard one of dere colored people talkin' 'bout it last night."

"Why couldn't you say that before?" retorted Thorne, wheeling his horse.

The negro muttered something about "disremembering" —astonished and cowed by this unprecedented sharpness from his companion, and quickened the motion of his steed to keep up with Frisk's lively trot. The branch road was freshly cut, narrow and full of stumps. Thorne recognized

the peculiar surge of the blast through a pine wood, into whose heart they seemed to have entered, and was grateful for the shield and shelter afforded by the evergreen wall.

"Ha! Stand up, sir!"

Frisk had touched his foot against a tall stump, and would have gone down upon his knees, but for the powerful support of the rein.

"He is lame! He has hurt himself in the shoulder or foot," continued Thorne, a minute later. "I must see what the matter is."

He got down, unclosed the bull's eye of the useful little lantern, and made an examination.

"Hark! what is that!"

He raised himself and listened. The sound was repeated —a shrill neigh from the darkness before them. Reuben's horse replied by a similar note.

"Dat's Bruce, sure as you're born!" ejaculated the man, excitedly.

Without waiting for orders, he struck ahead. Thorne had just remounted, when he heard the hostler speak in confident, cheery terms, and the whinny of joy that responded. The slide of the lantern was still open, and its blaze fell first upon the white wolf-skin, then flashed upon the wet bars of a rude gate, the outer entrance to some farm. This barrier had stopped the horse in his progress to the residence of the sick girl. The road was not wide enough for him to turn in, unguided, without danger of upsetting the vehicle; and the faithful, sagacious animal had borne storm, hunger and fatigue, with a patient fortitude that would have been termed heroism in man—for, no one knew how many weary hours.

No one knew! Least of all, the master, upon whose knees lay the reins. He was not dead, for he breathed; not sleeping, for the strangled stertorous respiration belonged neither

to repose nor health; yet the eyes were closed, and the body had sunk back loosely and helplessly upon the cushions of the carriage. Nor had violence been offered him. The robes were tucked in securely; his coat was buttoned over his chest, and his scarf was wound around his neck, as Miriam had tied it, in kissing him "good-bye."

Thorne's arrangements were quickly made. The carriage lamps were lighted; Frisk committed to Reuben's care; he took his own seat beside the insensible form; piled the coverings more closely over it, and drove homeward as fast as the storm and darkness would allow.

"Ten o'clock!" said Miriam, folding up her work. "Mamma, you look very weary. Had not you better go to bed?"

Mrs. Hartley aroused from a doze, into which she had subsided half an hour before.

"Do you think so, dear? I believe I *am* rather tired, although not in the least sleepy. You know it is store-room day, and there was more setting to rights to do than usual. Oh! did I tell you that I found another jar of the peach pickle Mr. Thorne likes so much? How it got upon the preserve shelf I cannot divine, but there it was! I was almost certain there was one missing."

"I am glad you found it. It was in good order I hope," said Miriam, absently.

"What are you thinking of, dear? When have you ever known *my* pickles to spoil? Did you notice how your grandpapa enjoyed that walnut catsup at dinner?"

"Yes, ma'am. He said that he had never tasted finer."

"Dear father," pursued Mrs. Hartley, contemplatively. "It is a great delight to me to give him pleasure, even in small things. He has been the stay and comfort of my whole life. I am thankful that he did not attempt to ride home through this dreadful night. Just hear the wind!"

Hear it! Miriam had heard nothing else for the past hour, and the screaming blast had worn her nerves to the quick.

"I trust there will be cover enough upon his bed, if he goes to sleep at all at Mr. Mills'," said the elder lady. "It does not seem to me that it can be necessary for two doctors to sit up the whole night. What do you think of it?"

"I hope that Grandpapa is sound asleep, under a sufficient number of blankets by this time, and his tired daughter will do well to imitate his example, without delay."

She carried her mother's work-basket up to the chamber, helped undress her, and saw that every thing was in readiness for her night's rest; read aloud a portion of scripture to her, after she was laid down; kissed her, and wended her way back to the study, upon pretence of seeing that the house was locked up.

She started slightly at perceiving that the room was not vacant—surprise, dispelled by the sight of the intruder's face. It was her mother's maid, Reuben's wife, who stood by the fire, apparently waiting for an audience.

"Is any thing the matter, Becky? Do you want to speak to me?"

"I was wishin' to, Miss Mir'um. Thar's somethin' wrong somewhere, and I thought you had better know it. Or, maybe you can tell me more'n I can tell you. You may happen to know where Mr. Thorne and my ole man has gone, through this terrible weather, and what 'twas Mr. Thorne told that sassy, stuck-up Parker, to keep from Mistis and you, Miss Mir'um. I heard him say that much with my own ears; for I was passin' through the upsta'rs entry. And that Parker—he's so hard-headed and tough-hearted, that he wont let on a word to me, whose husband is a-riding out in this awful storm, and like as not, may be laid up with rheumatiz for six weeks, and I have to nuss him. It's hard to b'ar, Miss Mir'um!"

"Are you deranged, Becky? Mr. Thorne has gone to see Mrs. Mills, who is extremely ill—probably dying."

"He aint use' to takin' Reuben 'long for company," returned the woman, with the sulky dignity of a petted servant. "It's a new thing for Mr. Thorne to be skeery—no matter how dark and late it is. No, ma'am! There's somethin' out o' order, and though 'taint my business to 'vise you, if I was in your place, I'd know the reason why my horse, that I'd treated tender as a baby, is dragged out of the warm stable, and rid in such weather as this. Mr. Thorne's horse is lame, but he wouldn't stop for that. He rode Frisk, and it stands to reason he wouldn't a-done it, 'thout somethin' mighty was the matter."

Miriam's color had faded entirely away, yet she had the strength to speak collectedly.

"Whatever Mr. Thorne has done, is right and proper. You need not be uneasy lest Reuben should come to harm in his service. I have told you all I know of their movements. Try and wait patiently until they come home. Now you can go."

Every member of the establishment knew the meaning of those carefully subdued tones, and from the decision they conveyed, none dared appeal. Becky stood less in awe of her young mistress' decrees than any of the other servants, for she had nursed her, when she was a baby, but even she was obliged to confess that she "could argue with Miss Mir'um till she turned white, and talked low. Then 'twas time to quit."

Miriam remained perfectly quiet until the door shut behind the woman; then rang the bell for Parker. He was not far away. Devoured by restless fears, he had spent the evening in wandering from the kitchen to the house, from piazza to the dining-room window, at which look-out he was stationed when he heard the bell. One view of his

young mistress' countenance showed him that prevarication would not avail to conceal the truth from her.

"What called Mr. Thorne away from home to-night?"

The man hesitated.

"I want the truth! I will have it! Had it any thing to do with your master's absence?"

Parker dared not deny that her suspicions were just, but he tried to soften his account, wherever he could risk deceiving her.

"P'raps after all, Mr. Thorne found Marster at Mr. Mills' when he got there, and they've both been persuaded to stay over night. It's storming very hard."

"Did your master ever fail to return home, because of the weather?"

"Why—he's very brave, generally, ma'am, to be sure, but then he's gettin' along to a prudent age—" stammered the butler, intent upon quelling her alarms.

Miriam waved her hand, in token that she had heard all she would.

"See that the fire in his room is burning well, and have hot, fresh coffee made at once!"

"It's b'iling on the dinin'-room hearth, now, ma'am. I've a nice supper ready. The Lord send 'em home soon to eat it!"

He departed to replenish the fire, already well-plied with fuel; to add a trifle or two to the repast, whose preparation had beguiled one of the heavy hours—and then to resume his watch in the porch.

Miriam threw up the sash and leaned from the window. An inky sky—fast-pelting rain; groaning trees; a legion of wind-demons, shrieking hoarsely around the building—and from the distant woods, a roar, like beating waves upon a wrecker's beach;—these were all she saw and heard.

"*Can* they be abroad in such a night!" she murmured,

drawing back, strangled by the dash of freezing water in her face.

How warm and bright the room looked! how mournfully empty the great chair and the garments laid ready for its owner!

"And I can do nothing! nothing!" cried she, wringing her hands. She sank to her knees, before the chair. "Oh, Father! in the midst of deserved wrath, remember mercy! remember mercy!"

Mingled with the fury of the elements, were other sounds —human voices—steps upon the piazza; a door opened; a bold, equal stride rang along the hall to the study. She did not rise. Whatever was in store for her, she would meet here and thus! A cold hand clasped hers; an arm was passed about her waist, and lifted her to her feet. Her imploring gaze rested upon Neale Thorne's marbled features.

"Dearest Miriam! He is living and will be here very soon!"

"Thank God! thank God!"

Again, she would have knelt; but he did not release her.

"He is ill—how dangerously, I cannot say. It is, I fear, an apoplectic stroke. Dr. Fairchild is coming home with him. We called by for him. I rode forward to tell you. Have you the strength to meet them, and to see that every thing is done for your Grandfather's comfort?"

"I have!"

Once more, that mighty shudder, which Thorne remembered so well, went over and through her—the fierce grappling of will with nerve and feeling, and out of convulsion was born calmness. His heart melted in pitying tenderness at thought of the aching, bleeding one, scarce rallied from the shock of the former woe, upon which this news had fallen.

"Darling!" He did not know that he said it, nor did her

hand tremble in his fervent grasp. "I wish that I could bear this for you. There is but One who can sustain you, and He will! You will not forget what we were talking of, this evening? 'Thou *shalt* know hereafter!'"

"Speak to him, Miss Miriam!" urged Dr. Fairchild, when the sick man was settled in his bed. "He will know you, if he does any one."

"Grandpapa!" called the girl.

The heavy eyelids did not stir.

"Dear Grandpapa!"

But for the loud breathing, it might have seemed that Death had already claimed his prey.

"That will do!" said the doctor, despondently. "We must wait!"

Privately, he expressed to Thorne his fears that his patient would never regain consciousness.

"There must have been a lapse of several hours between the seizure and your discovery of him. According to my calculations, the attack must have come on before he reached the turning, he would otherwise have taken, to Mills' place. The horse, left to himself, chose the route he was most accustomed to travel. Then, the exposure will operate against him. You noticed nothing unusual in his conduct, prior to his leaving home, you say?"

"Nothing. He appeared well and cheerful, at setting out. We had a grave, and somewhat agitating conversation, soon after dinner. He wished to make his will, he said, and the reference to its conditions seemed to affect him. But that this sadness did not oppress him long, I think I have evidence in a letter, which was picked up by one of the servants, in the bottom of the buggy. It is a paper, in which he had no interest, beyond the similarity of the signature, with that appended to a communication he once had from a stranger. The letter belongs to me, and I handed it to him, as he was

starting, telling him that its sole point of resemblance to the one he had showed me, was in the name. They were written by different hands. With no end in view, except the gratification of a passing curiosity, he yet unfolded this, for perusal, between the times of his parting from me and his sudden illness. This, to me, refutes the idea of any engrossing preoccupation of mind."

"You are positive that there was nothing in the letter, which could have affected him?"

"Quite sure! He never saw the person to whom it was addressed, never heard of him, until I mentioned him, and, as I have said, the writer was a stranger."

"He had no mercy upon himself," rejoined Dr. Fairchild. "His wonderful constitution enabled him to discharge double the portion of work that belonged to his years, and he presumed upon his powers of endurance. We need not refer to other causes than this indefatigable industry, this undue activity of the brain, to explain his abrupt breaking-down. I have no hope of his recovery. I do not believe that he will ever be sensible again, although, upon this point I am not certain. You can do as you judge best, about preparing the family for the sad event. It is a superstition in these parts that when Death has once entered a house, he leaves the door ajar after him, and I am often tempted to credit it."

For four days, the giant frame opposed a stern, if a passive resistance to the invading disease; but the mind was torpid. The eye wandered dully from one familiar countenance to another, beamless and vacant; the tongue seemed palsied; the bed held an image of living death. The fifth night brought a change; restlessness—efforts to rise—to speak—succeeded speedily by prostration and an apparent restoration to reason. He knew his daughter and grandchild; returned the pressure of their hands, and tried feebly to smile in their faces.

A cloud swept, swift and troubled, over his visage, as he saw Thorne, upon the other side of him. He strove mightily for speech, but it was the faintest of husky whispers Neale put his ear to the convulsed lips.

"Your will?" he interpreted the unformed articulation.

Dr. Stanton made a gesture of assent.

"You wish me to get it?"

The same mode of affirmation.

"But, my dear sir, you are too weak, at present to sign it. Have you forgotten your declaration that the law would make a just one, if this were never legalized?"

The dying man was agonized by his endeavor to reply. As plainly, as signs and fragmentary sentences could express it, he signified his opposition to the suggested delay.

"I must do it!" He beckoned Dr. Fairchild to him. "Pen—ink—paper! I know what I want," was all that could be understood.

"I believe that he does!" said the physician to Thorne. "Do whatever you can to pacify him."

Thus instructed, Neale went down-stairs and returned with the unsigned paper. Although meant as a mere rough draught, it was worded clearly and formally, and needed no revision. It was one of the writer's maxims, that whatever was worth doing at all, was worth doing well. He read it aloud, rapidly yet distinctly. Dr. Stanton listened intelligently, from beginning to end.

"This—" said Thorne, in concluding—"is your will and testament, written by myself, at your dictation, on Thursday last, the 24th day of November. Do you acknowledge it as such, in the presence of these witnesses?"

"I do!" was said, almost aloud—"but"—he made a gesture of writing upon the bottom of the sheet.

"Your signature, and those of two witnesses?"

"No!" was signed.

"You wish to subjoin a codicil?"

"Yes."

"For the benefit of some one?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

The trembling hand was raised, and fell heavily upon Miriam's shoulder. The eye confirmed the gesture.

Here was a puzzle! Dr. Fairchild shook his head in dumb show, behind Miriam, to notify Thorne that he might be dealing with a failing mind. Thorne thought differently. He believed that the intellect was right, and that there was a purpose and a method in these singular demonstrations. But how to arrive at their meaning nearly distracted him, in view of the vital importance of each passing moment. A subtle gleam arrested his vision. It was from Cousin Clarice's eye. Summoned by Mrs. Hartley the day after the Doctor's attack, she had flown to the bedside of her sick uncle, and now hovered about him, with a strained intensity of solicitude. Like a lightning-flash there occurred to Thorne her persecution of her younger cousin, and domination over the elder. Why might not the grandfather have observed this also, and apprehended trouble for the future of his darling, from this unfriendly influence?

Neale loathed the duty set for his adoption by this thought; but since it *was* duty, he could not shirk it.

"Mrs. Hartley, will you be so kind as to withdraw for a moment, with Miss Miriam and Miss Stanton? Mrs. Fry and Dr. Fairchild will please remain. Is it your wish, Dr. Stanton," he said, clearly and deliberately, when the three ladies had retired, "to entail a portion of your estate, that, at Mrs. Hartley's death her half of the property shall revert, without reservation, to her daughter? If this is your meaning, will you signify it by joining your hands?"

Dr. Stanton smiled, almost gladly, a look of unspeakable

relief and satisfaction—raised his hands impressively, then interlocked their fingers. Thorne wrote a few lines, recalled the banished trio, and read the codicil in their hearing, appealing the second time, and with a like result, to Dr. Stanton, for his assent.

"This scene seems to me cruel and unnecessary!" said Cousin Clarice, pathetically. "The clause, obtained at such cost to our dear father's mind and strength, is practically of no importance. Surely, my cousin's maternal affection might have been trusted thus far."

"She has overshot the mark!" thought Thorne, as a blaze leaped up in the fading eye.

Horror, grief, and despair contended for the mastery in his expression, as the sick man found his utmost efforts inadequate to render his meaning intelligible. Thorne bent over him until his ear nearly touched his lips.

"Miriam!" "Not her only child!" he caught and repeated.

"Just as I said!" put in Cousin Clarice. "As her only child, she would naturally become her mother's heiress. If she were not, there might be reason in such a provision. Depend upon it, Mr. Thorne, you have reversed his meaning in adding your codicil."

"Have I misunderstood you, sir?" Thorne kept his regards fixed upon the unquiet features.

"No! no! no!" was motioned by lips and hands.

He closed his eyes—they supposed to sleep. It soon appeared that he paused to muster his failing forces. More audibly than he had yet spoken, he pronounced a single word—looking anxiously from mother to daughter. It was "*Henry!*"

Dr. Fairchild touched Thorne's elbow. "He will not be satisfied, I see, until this matter is gone through with, useless as it is. Write his name; then give him the pen, and

let him make what mark he can, over against his signature. Whatever you do, let it be done quickly. If he has been rational up to this time, he cannot retain his senses long. This is a queer business, take it all together! Mrs. Fry and myself will add our names to make the thing legal."

"I cannot tell you, Clarice," sobbed Mrs. Hartley, the next morning, as she sat with her confidante in her darkened chamber, "I cannot express my thankfulness that our beloved father's last articulate word was my precious boy's name. His severity to poor Harry was the only harsh action I ever knew him to perform. It is a sweet—a blessed comfort to me to be assured that he regretted it at the last, and remembered the dear fellow with affection!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PRODIGAL.

THERE had been many moments since the hopelessness of his love was discovered to him, when Thorne had seriously questioned the prudence of continuing an inmate of Dr. Stanton's house. Had the nature of his feelings and their disappointment been known to Miriam, there would have remained no alternative. His constant presence, by recalling the thought of the pain she had inflicted, should not have distressed her for a single day after his hopes had received their death-blow. But since his secret was still his own, and his suffering unsuspected, it was braver to sustain it unflinchingly—more generous to accept her friendship as candidly as it was offered, and repay it by disinterested service. Thus he reasoned when his mind was in healthy tone, and the resolution was stanch enough to bear him up in the hours of weakness and longing that sometimes overtook him in solitude.

Dr. Stanton's death seemed to settle the question of duty definitively. By a singular Providence, the mother and daughter were left without any other protector than himself. Humanity united with grateful memories of the dead in forbidding him to desert them in the lonely depths of their affliction. Gossip itself stood abashed and respectful at the manner in which he discharged his trust. With authority as absolute as it was unostentatious, he assumed the control of all necessary arrangements for the obsequies; all applica-

tions for orders and statements of articles to be procured were brought to him, and answered with a promptitude and discretion that left no incomplete details to harass the grief-stricken mistress. Thus passed the two days that intervened from the time of the decease to that of the interment. From sunrise until bed-time, he held himself in readiness to respond to every call upon his time and thoughts, apparent master of his own feelings, and the consolation, no less than the helper, of the mourners; no one seeming to remember that another and an onerous duty would be exacted of him at the public and closing scene of the sad preparations, and for which he must make ready.

The services were held in the church. The edifice was crowded to excess. Solemnity, profound to painfulness, reigned throughout the immense throng. Apart from the personal attachment felt by most present for the departed patriarch, there was an earnest sentiment of compassion for the survivors of a household so frequently and grievously afflicted. There were not many eyes which could withhold their tears as the daughter and grandchild followed the coffin up the aisle—the two frail women bereft of their last earthly prop. "It was an inscrutable dispensation," said friends, in wondering sympathy, and if there were those who doubted its wisdom and mercy, it was with the presumption of the fallible creature, that sought to penetrate what the All-wise had chosen to shroud in mystery.

The young Pastor was very pale. Days of grief and care, and nights of study had worn him to a shadow of his usual self. Still his eyes held their light, clear, mournfully serene—his voice had never possessed greater depth and sweetness, than rolled through the church, the first sentence of the funeral service he had compiled for this occasion—

"All ye that are about him bemoan him; and all ye that

know his name, say: 'How is the strong staff broken, and the beautiful rod!'"

The text of the sermon sounded like a gracious rebuke to many a murmuring heart—"What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter!" None—or very few of those who listened to the noble utterances of assured Faith; the sublime confidence in the right-doing and loving dealing of the Father; the exultant prophecies of Hope, whose anchor was cast, sure and fast, beyond the mystic veil of present providences and seeming sorrows, thought to ask how the speaker had fortified his own soul against the pleadings of filial tenderness; how resisted the flood of softening memories that rushed upon it, with each allusion to the majestic life-warrior, who lay dead beneath the pulpit. Of his obligations to this second father, he could not, and did not speak. In this respect, and this alone, the man overruled the pastor.

They lowered the husband to the side of the wife, who had awaited his coming for thirty years. People whispered to each other, with a sort of curious awe, how full the graveyard was getting—and eyes passed pityingly from the little mound, as yet unmarked by burial stone, to the wider and longer heap of frozen earth the busy spades were beating into the same shape.

When the bereaved family was left again to itself, Mrs. Hartley essayed to thank Thorne for his thoughtful and untiring kindness—but breaking down with the effort, cast her arms about his neck, and wept upon his breast, as if he were, in blood, the son he had showed himself to be, in heart.

"Dear Cousin! the scenes of the day have been too trying for you!" said Cousin Clarice, attempting to draw her away. "You can understand, and make allowances for her excitable state, Mr. Thorne!"

Her tone of distressful apology wrought instantly upon

Mrs. Hartley's senses. Blushing deeply, she released Neale from her embrace, and stammered a word of excuse.

"Not so, my dear Madam!" he interrupted. "I cannot let you regret what is to me the sweetest exhibition of affection I have had, since my own mother wept her farewell in my arms."

His tone faltered; he stooped toward her, kissed her forehead and quitted the room.

A month had brought to the smitten ones—not contentment under their loss, but a growing endeavor to sustain it with Christian resignation. They were not accustomed to the absence of him they had revered and loved; but they were striving to learn to live without him—harsh lesson for fond and constant hearts! It chanced about this time, that Thorne was called, by business, to F——, the nearest city to Limestone, a distance of over fifty miles. He was absent two days, returning late in the afternoon of the second. The evening train connected directly with the Southern route, and Neale made his way into the car, through a pushing, bustling, noisy crowd, and piles of baggage. Ensconcing himself in the corner of a seat, he wrapped his dreadnaught about him, and prepared for a silent ride, and a meditative.

He felt, presently, that some one had entered the space between his bench and the one in front. A small valise was thrust under the latter, a shawl unfolded and doubled lengthwise, and then flung over a pair of shoulders, that towered within a couple of feet of the top of the car; finally, a figure settled down into its place upon the seat, and a long breath announced satisfaction and expectation of comfort. Thorne had had a glimpse of a finely-cut profile; of luxuriant whiskers—there even gleamed, from between the folds of the gray plaid, a snowy line of cravat; and he was quite prepared for the recognition that followed the deliberate turning of the full face toward him.

"Mr. Thorne! This is an unexpected pleasure!"

"Good evening, Dr. Bogus! I hope that you are well, sir!"

"You are on your way home, I suppose?" said the D. D. when he had honored his junior brother by a shake of the hand.

"I am, sir."

"I wish I could go all the way with you; but I get off at Campbell's—about ten miles this side of your pretty town —is it not?"

"Twelve, I believe."

"I had a summons by telegraph, yesterday, begging me to preach the funeral of Mr. Sterling May, who had died that morning. He was a valued acquaintance of mine, and the intelligence of his decease occasioned me much concern. I have been forced, of late years, to decline most applications of this description. They rain in upon me, from all parts of the state. One would really imagine that half the churches in Kentucky were pastorless, judging from the number and urgency of the appeals. But I cannot refuse the Mays a favor. They would be sadly disappointed, and they are a most lovely family."

"Besides being the wealthiest and most influential, in their county!" was in Thorne's mind, and sent a glimmer of amusement into his eyes.

"The trouble of the business is"—continued the persecuted divine, with a complacency that proved him to be a resigned, if not a joyful victim—"these funerals are attended by such immense concourses of people, that the preparation of the sermon is a matter of more time and thought than one in my position can afford to bestow upon a gratuitous effort. You happy brethren, whose lines are cast in more retired places, cannot rightly sympathize with the woes of us city pastors. Be advised by me, my young friend, and set your

face, like a flint, against all alluring wiles that would drag you from your modest little church. Better is contentment and a village, than high places and hard work withal."

"Precept without example is a poor tutor," rejoined Thorne. "Why not try the Village of Content yourself, since you have such a lively realization of its superior delights?"

Dr. Bogus gave his slight, gentlemanly laugh.

"Do you remember Esop's fable of the mouse who gnawed his way into a savory cheese, and abode there, until, when he would have tasted the outer air again, he found that he had grown too fat to go through the hole by which he had entered? There was no alternative but to stay and eat up the cheese, in luxurious solitude, or submit to the humbling process of starving himself into a leaner animal—a scorn to his comrades, and a warning to the future generations of Mouse-land. If one could step from a high post to a lower, without shrinking into a smaller man, the operation would not be so severe. Is it possible that those fellows have succeeded in getting into my neighborhood again?"

The annoyed exclamation was elicited by the self-induction of two men into the seat before them. They were equipped in fashionable—rather flashy travelling suits. One was apparently about thirty-five, with coarse and not prepossessing physiognomy. His companion was several years younger, and, notwithstanding a reckless, dissipated air, was strikingly handsome. When Thorne's attention was first called to him, he was standing in the aisle, adjusting a shawl upon the back of a bench, so as to form at once a wrapper and a cushion. A jetty mustache curled away from his lips, to mingle with a long, glossy beard; the teeth, showed by his smile, were beautifully white and even; he had a well-formed nose, with spirited-looking nostrils, and a bright,

dancing eye. Taller by a head than his comrade, he was straight as a shaft, and pliable as a willow. All this Thorne saw before he flung himself into his place, with a remark to his fellow-passenger, that reached the ears of those sitting behind him.

"I can tell you, Jack, I believe I am beginning to feel nervous!" confirmed by an oath.

"Oh! that is decorum personified, in comparison with their average behavior and language, since I got on at L——," observed Dr. Bogus, coolly, noticing Thorne's grave look. "They are *en route* from New Orleans, it would seem, and having been so unfortunate as to sit in front of them, most of the way, I have been forced to learn that they are bound upon a penitential pilgrimage to their father's house, having wasted their portion in riotous living."

"If appearances are not very deceitful in this case, I should say that they had picked up sustenance more nutritious than husks during their exile," said Thorne.

"I happen to know that their profession is many degrees less respectable than that of feeding swine," responded the Doctor. "I have the very useful faculty of never forgetting a face that I have once studied. A year ago, I was in New Orleans, and procured the attendance of a trusty guide to some of the gambling palaces, for which the city is notorious. In one of them I saw that young fellow, playing with such dare-devil rashness—wearing, all the while, as cool a smile as you saw on his features just now—and contrasting so forcibly with the trembling excitement of his opponent, a man old enough to be his father, that I could not resist the temptation to pause and see the game out. I should know him among a thousand others. I recognized him the instant I beheld him to-day."

"His is not a countenance to be forgotten easily," re-

marked Thorne, whose memory was every whit as retentive as that of his senior, although he never cared to parade its excellence.

He was ransacking its closets now, for the previous impression of the prodigal's handsome visage. That flashing smile was certainly not strange to him, and the voice had a familiar ring and accent. When he traced the resemblance —for it was a likeness and not identity—the discovery, accidental though the similitude must be, gave him no pleasure, when connected with the snatches of ribald and profane talk that were borne backward, now and then, above the rattle and roar of the train. He put the idea from him, and listened to the reverend Doctor's continued criticisms.

"They were both half-drunk, three hours ago, but I heard the elder brother remind the other, as we neared F——, that they must 'hold up'—or he—the younger—'would not be in a condition to do the dutiful to-night.' A precious pair of scoundrels they are! The master furthermore invited the pupil to a calculation as to 'how the fatted calf would cut up!' Then followed a comparison of accounts and a little wrangling, to diversify the entertainment. If I knew the parents they are intending to dupe, I would expose them. It is atrocious! It makes my blood run cold to think of so villainous an imposture!"

Thorne was not habitually uncharitable, but neither was he so unsophisticated as to set down Dr. Bogus' warmth of reprobation to the credit of his righteous wrath against the unfilial pair, or compassion for the deluded parents. He shrewdly suspected that there was some personal cause of dislike of the strangers, before the next sentence betrayed its nature.

"After this sample of their principles and manners—the constant slang of 'the ancient governor,' 'the old lady,' and 'deuced fine girls'—I was not surprised at their insolence to

myself at the dépôt. In swaggering past, they brushed roughly against me. Of course I looked indignant, as I stepped aside to give them a wide berth. The younger was evidently inclined to stop and apologize, but the other gave him a pull—'Come along!' he said, with a shocking oath. 'Don't you see it is only a parson?'"

Thorne's smile was not at the incident, or the Doctor's just resentment. He could not help remembering a remark of Mrs. Fry's in connection with white neckcloths. "For my part, I would'nt want my husband to wear a badge about his throat, that would prevent his knocking down any fellow who dared insult me in the street, or while travelling!"

The discussion of the "fast" couple had been carried on in a subdued tone, and was now exchanged for a freer conversation, chiefly relative to Dr. Stanton's decease and the attendant circumstances. This was terminated by their arrival at Campbell's station, where Dr. Bogus was to get out, upon his melancholy errand. Thorne saw, from his window, a gentleman spring forward, with outstretched hand, to greet him, as he stepped from the platform; then, two more hurry up eagerly. A carriage stood hard by, toward which the three were escorting the D. D., in state, when the train moved on. If Dr. Bogus had a thought to spare from the afflictions of the "most lovely family," and his own consequence, and bestowed it upon his late companion, it was in comfortable assurance that he had afforded the young man a vast deal of pleasure, and conferred upon him no mean distinction, by his condescension—besides interpenetrating him thoroughly with the idea of his—Rev. Dr. Bogus'—magnificent importance in the social and religious world. How erroneous was his estimate of the "young man's" observant qualities, was evidenced by the shrug and smile with which Thorne sank back into his place

—an expression of pure mirth, unalloyed by a shade of envy.

"There are humbugs in all professions, and ours is no exception!" he muttered, amusedly; and by the time the locomotive reached another milestone, Dr. Bogus was forgotten, in thoughts of the home, to which he was now drawing very near.

He could hardly wait for the cars to slacken their speed to a safe rate, for such an attempt, before he leaped off, at the Limestone Dépôt. The first person he recognized was Reuben, peering anxiously into the faces of the passengers, who streamed past him, on their way to the supper-room, the train halting there to allow them opportunity to take that meal.

"Ah! Mr. Thorne!" showing a double set of ivories—"I was lookin' for you, sir! De carriage is waitin'! Hope you're come back to us safe and sound, sir!"

"I have—thank you, Reuben. Are all well at home?"

"Very well, sir. Where's your baggage, sir?"

"I have nothing but my valise. There was no need for you to bring your horses out to-night. I should not have minded walking up home."

"No trouble, sir! Couldn't let you do *dat*, nohow! Mistis ordered me to come, and we all is willin' and glad to do what we can for you, Mr. Thorne!"

He seized the light valise and carried it to the carriage. Thorne had to walk the length of the platform, on the outside of the Dépôt, and encountered sundry acquaintances on the way.

"Good evening, sir! How are you?" "Glad to see you back, Mr. Thorne!" "My dear sir—you are welcome home again!" were exclamations that met him from one and another. It was very pleasant—this volley of cordial greetings! He got into the carriage with a feeling that Lime-

stone was indeed his home, and that there was no other place in the world which he loved so well. In shutting the door, Reuben did not make the bolt secure. It swung open as the horses started. Thorne caught it, and the action brought into his view the two men who had sat before him in the car, standing within half-a-dozen feet of the vehicle, and surveying it, or him, with fixed curiosity. The glare from a lighted window rendered their features clearly visible. Both were laughing—at what, he did not care to conjecture. His self-love was not sensitive, and his self-respect was in a state of healthy development. The darkness that blotted them from his eyes, also swallowed up the recollection of the ill-mannered twain.

He had more agitating subjects of thought. Four months' daily schooling had trained him to an external semblance of kindly friendliness toward Miriam. Her mother claimed him as her son;—he thus became her daughter's brother, and, save in the matter of the innocent familiarities which sisters may receive from brothers, he demeaned himself as such. But he was not satisfied. The chained heart tore at the bars sometimes; threatened to rend the hateful barrier and win what it desired, or be crushed in the effort. It was very restive to-night. With the red gleams from parlor and dining-room windows, came the old dream—the harder to conquer, because it had known the rapture of indulgence—the vision of a home and wife of his own.

The hall-door was opened by Mrs. Hartley herself.

"Welcome home, Mr. Thorne! We have missed you very sadly!"

Miriam issued from the parlor, while he was answering her mother's inquiries as to his health, and whether he had suffered from cold in his ride.

"We are glad to see you," she said, simply, with no pretence of reserve, or undue manifestation of delight.

Her hand was chill as his, he felt, in pressing it, but she looked well—better than she had done when he left home. It was not a flattering thought, yet he was not so selfish as to wish that it had been otherwise. He watched over her very carefully, in these days; never forgetting that in her parent she had also lost her physician. She had grown thinner since Willie's death, and her motions, without being less graceful, were not so alert, nor her manner so vivacious as of yore.

He remarked silently upon the change, as she stood at one corner of the fire-place, while he basked in the cheery blaze; she replying to his questions about home matters, and asking others touching his trip. Mrs. Hartley had slipped out to order supper to be served, and they had the fire and room to themselves.

"I had as a companion to-night a particular friend of yours," said Thorne archly—"or, a particular favorite would be a more correct expression."

"Indeed! who was it?"

"Dr. Bogus."

A flood of crimson swept up to her temples, and her mouth took the old disdainful curl.

"He is neither friend nor favorite of mine!" She bit her lip hard; released it, and spoke gravely and frankly. "I have never apologized to you, Mr. Thorne, for my strange behavior at meeting you in the west porch, the night Dr. Bogus took tea with us last September. Mamma, Cousin Clarice and myself were in the parlor, during your discussion of Woman and her rights, and heard all that was said. I was very angry—foolishly angry, I admit—with him, for he did not merit a feeling so active, and very grateful to you for defending us. I escaped from the room before he entered; I could not have borne to meet him in my then state of mind!—and sought cooler thoughts in the night air. My

encounter with you was unexpected. I acted impulsively—indiscreetly—unbecomingly! I fear that I forfeited some portion of your respect—"

"Say no more—I beg of you! Nothing that you would say or do, could cause me to respect you less. Do not imagine this for a second."

"You are mistaken! You forgive and forget readily. I found that out long ago, else I could never have looked you in the eyes again. You are too just to let one fault, however great, estrange you from a friend; are more lenient than I deserve."

She said this seriously—almost mournfully—or he would have bantered her upon her self-depreciatory mood.

"I cannot divine to what you refer. I can only repeat that my respect for you has remained intact, since I first came to know you well. What is this awful fault which I have forgotten and forgiven?"

Her cheeks flamed with confusion, that would not let her lift her eyes;—then, a dire heart-pang wrung out the color as suddenly.

"What does this mean?" pressed Neale, perplexed. "Are you afraid to confide to me that which, you yet say, I have once known and let slip from my memory? Am I more formidable now than I was then?"

"Have you forgotten the 'Voices of the Rain,' and the scene that followed?" was asked, so softly that he hardly heard it.

He, too, changed color at the question—but it was in hope as well as pain. Had the sorrow that had ripened her into a gentler, lovelier maturity of womanhood, wrought likewise upon this long-cherished girlish passion? Was it the memory of this—its blindness and extravagance—that awakened regretful shame? Would he act wisely now were he to affect to misunderstand her—to shrink from

accepting the confidence she seemed willing to accord him? Had he the strength to listen to the story from her lips—the tale that had stolen from his life the light of earthly love? The thought that her allusion was to her unchristian and childish display of passion on the occasion mentioned, did not once present itself. He had indeed forgotten this, but it was pressed out of recollection, by the weight of the overwhelming sorrow that followed her outbreak.

The lines about his mouth were tight and livid, as he turned to her.

"It would be idle and untrue, were I to attempt to disguise the fact that I suffered much that night. But there was in that suffering no cause of self-reproach to you. I honored you then as truly as I do now. I cannot permit you to disbelieve this. I had no right—"

"'Our dear Mr. Thorne has returned,' Cousin says!" Cousin Clarice sent the exclamation, as an avant-courier, into the parlor. "I met her in the hall just now, and she electrified me by this charming piece of news. How are you, Mr. Thorne?" giving him her thin hand. "This has been a doleful house since your departure. Your buoyant temperament inspirits us all, while we are subjected to its influence. We have an idea of depriving the Grand Street Church of their 'able and popular pastor,' and installing him as private chaplain here. And how is your dear sister?"

"She was well when I last heard from her—thank you! I have not had a letter from Maryland for a week and more."

"Why, Miriam, darling! have you not given Mr. Thorne his letters? I took it for granted that he had not been here a half-hour, without seeing them, especially as there is one among them directed in Miss Gertrude's hand."

"They are in your room," said Miriam to Thorne.

"But you might—you should have sent for them, my dear! I will call Parker—"

"There is no need, Miss Stanton. I am going directly up-stairs. I had not the courage to leave this cheerful hearthstone—before you came in."

Which equivocal observation he left her to digest. It was too sweet to be at "home" again; to hear Mrs. Hartley's affectionate tones; to meet Miriam's smile—she smiled more frequently at supper, that night, than was usual with her of late—it was pleasant to be waylaid by one and another of the servants, in the hall, all eager with their welcomes; to notice Parker's pleased alacrity, in waiting on him at table;—he was too happy in nursing into active life the faint hope nestling in his heart—born of Miriam's unexplained inquiry—to be annoyed by a dozen Cousin Clarices; and we have Mrs. Fry's authority for stating that there was but one in the Universe. She courted him sedulously at this date. His influence in the household was almost that of a master, and her astute brain perceived the expediency of getting upon his blind side, if he had one. Again, he had certainly done her one good turn—as she discovered upon reflection—in securing her legacy, by having the will ratified at the bedside of her expiring uncle, and upon his testimony—she had been informed—the validity of the document depended mainly. Until the bequest was actually paid into her hands, it was sound policy to lick the hand that had held the pen. Thorne saw into her scheming mind, as plainly as if Momus' window were set in her trim bust, and seeing, submitted, good-naturedly, to be toadied, except when worship of him involved detraction of Miriam, when he had a habit of administering some such "settler" as that with which he had left the parlor this evening.

Among the letters upon his table was one that required an immediate reply. The post-office was closed at ten o'clock, and about half-past eight, he withdrew to his room,

to write the requisite answer, promising to rejoin the circle in the parlor before long. He had just affixed his signature to the single page he had penned, when he heard a rousing knock at the front door, and then a man's voice address some inquiry to the servant who obeyed the summons. Neale directed and sealed the epistle, in momentary expectation of being sent for to see the visitor, but no messenger appeared.

"Why must people always call just when they are not wanted?" he soliloquized, ringing the bell.

Parker presented himself.

"Can you send this to the office for me?" asked Mr. Thorne.

"I will take it myself, sir. I am going into town to-night, anyhow."

"Thank you! Who is down-stairs?"

"A gentleman, to see Mrs. and Miss Hartley—a stranger, Abby says. She let him in."

"He did not ask for me?"

"No, sir; I was partickler in inquiring that of her, when I heard your bell."

"Very well, there is the letter!"

He had no disposition to intrude upon the friendly or business interview, going on below-stairs—an animated one, he judged, from the varied tones, partially deadened by the flooring, the visitor being the principal speaker. He lighted a cigar; threw himself luxuriously back in his chair, and began to smoke. The ideal views, appearing by glimpses, through the pale-blue clouds, were tinged with hope—almost happiness. He had not expected any recompense for his silent devotion. Service, like love, was rendered because he could not help it; because, soul and body, he was hers—hers only, while she allowed him to contribute to her comfort. But, if this adamantine barrier of a prior attachment

should, without any dishonorable agency of his, dissolve into vapor, light as that he now blew into viewless air—

"God give me grace to be patient!" he said, drawing a long breath.

He was soon to have abundant need of the gift.

Ten o'clock—half-past—and the visitor had not gone! Perhaps it was an old friend, who would spend the night. If so, what had the ladies thought of his discourteous seclusion—doubly ungracious, after his absence, and the warmth of greeting that had applauded his return? At all events, it was his duty to go down at the hour for family worship, which had now arrived.

A singular tableau was grouped by the parlor fireside. Mrs. Hartley and her daughter were sitting upon the sofa, wheeled toward the hearth; the faces of both glowing with pleasure, while there were tears, yet undried, upon their cheeks—and between them, an arm encircling the waist of each, was the younger of the two travellers he had last seen upon the steps of the Dèpôt. Thorne was rooted to the floor with angry amazement. Mrs. Hartley ran to him—her hands clasped, and eyes streaming in rapturous thanksgiving.

"Oh, my dear friend! The Lord has granted us a great blessing—unlooked-for mercy, in our sorrow!"

Sobs prevented her speech; Miriam commanded herself more effectually, but her voice shook with excess of joy.

"Mr. Thorne, this is my brother, whom we have so long mourned as dead—Henry Hartley!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BEGGAR ON HORSEBACK.

THE young men exchanged a look of significant recognition, as their hands met, and there was no cordiality in the formal grasp. For a second after he had sat down, Thorne felt sick and stunned; overcome by the disagreeable surprise. *This*, then, was the home—this abode of holy loves and domestic virtues—to which the prodigal had brought his *pseudo* repentance—his abominable pretence of remorse for past misdeeds, and pledges of reformation!

Had Dr. Bogus been in his young brother's place, he would have cast behind his charitable back, all acquaintance with the real character of the profane gambler and drunken profligate, the instant he beheld him restored to the bosom of an eminently respectable and opulent family. So far from fulfilling his threats of exposure, even the insult to himself would have passed, like a breath, from his educated memory and conscience. He would, in figure, if not literally, have spread his priestly hands, in apostolic benediction, above the head of the wanderer, and welcomed him to the fold; would have carved the fatted calf into generous slices, and washed down the savory mess with a toast to the "stay and hope of this ancient house, now graciously and unexpectedly returned to the hearts and arms of loving friends," and breathed, in sly confidence, to the bottom of his glass—"*le roi est mort—vive le roi!*" If his virtuous anathemas against the nameless reprobate had been cited

against his present position, he would have laughed in amusement at the verdancy of the reference, and reminded him who made it, that "circumstances alter cases." They do —and consciences and principles, too!

Thorne was not Dr. Bogus, nor was he a graduate in politic hypocrisy. (If the sentence sounds like a synonyma, the reader can take his choice of the sections.) The silence which the mother and sister attributed to astonishment, and the prodigal enjoyed as the manifestation of chagrin at seeing the ground of his supremacy in the household cut from under his feet, was a mute battle between regard for the feelings of the rejoicing relatives, and the just wrath of an upright mind against the outrageous cheat practised upon them.

Young Hartley spoke first, in easy effrontery.

"I think that I have had the pleasure of seeing you before, Mr. Thorne. We came on in the same train, this evening—did we not?"

"Yes, sir, I sat directly behind you in the car." Thorne's eyes emphasized the reply.

"I noticed *you* more closely, as you were setting off for home. I cannot tell you, mother, how queerly I felt, when I saw Reuben's sooty visage, lighted up by his teeth!"

"Why did you not introduce yourself to Mr. Thorne, and come directly home with him, dear?"

The mother put the black curls away from his forehead, with her trembling fingers, and gazed tenderly into the handsome face.

"How could I tell whether you would receive a runaway who presented himself so boldly?"

"You ought to have known that Mamma could never refuse you any thing, Harry," said Miriam, "and that she would not have withheld her pardon and blessing, had you been away for fifteen, instead of almost five years." Seeing

her brother's brows contract, and her mother's eyes gather fresh tears, she added, more lightly to Thorne, "You saw Harry in the cars, you say. Did you observe his likeness to me? Mamma thinks it stronger than when he went away."

"I was struck by it, but supposed it to be accidental, of course. The resemblance was more marked to my casual glance then, than it is now that I see you together."

He could not say less. It would have been injudicious had he said more of the dissimilarity, and its nature. The pure, open brow, whereon his fancy had set the golden legend, brighter with each day of their companionship, until it was to him a crown of glory—could never receive the stamp of foul excesses that defiled her brother's. The steady look of her dark orbs was as unlike the impudent hardihood of his, as are the sun's rays at noontide, to the lurid glare of subterranean fires. In their innocent childhood, the expression, as well as the cast of their features may have been the same. Since then, they had sowed diverse seed, and each had harvested according to that which was planted.

What was the history of this resurrection, after more than four years' burial? So asked Limestone, in chorus, in various accents of wonder, curiosity and interest. Thorne had the tale from Mrs. Hartley, and the Limestonians, or such of them as were inclined to carry their inquiries to the fountain-head, were made welcome to the explanation from the mouth of the hero of the drama.

He told the story, generally, with a gay *insouciance* that had a flavor of wicked humor. He *had* been drowned, he said, by a luckless plunge from the deck of a Mississippi steamboat. Thus far the captain of the craft was correct in the statement he had forwarded to his relatives, together with the hat and trunk of the unfortunate man. It was a dark night, moonless, starless and foggy, and when Hartley

arose to the surface, and recovered from the bewilderment of the fall, he was utterly at a loss to decide as to the direction of the boat, whose paddle-wheels he could still hear. He swam about blindly, until he touched some solid substance, that proved to be a pile of drift-wood. Over this he clambered to the shore, and lay upon the bare earth until daybreak. He had abundant leisure for thought, through the hours of gloomy solitude, and conceived, then and there, the plan of allowing his former friends to believe him dead. He had quarrelled with his grandfather, and his wife's aunt, and, if his word were to be taken, been forbidden by both, ever to set foot upon their premises again. Dr. Stanton had given him a considerable sum of money, for the express purpose of defraying his expenses to some distant quarter of the continent. Miss Bent had declared that her niece should not remain an inmate of her house, unless she would consent to be separated from her husband. Since all his kindred would be better off without him, why not die to them, and embark upon a new life?

The contents of his pocket-book were unharmed by the water—upon these he had lived, until some other means of subsistence offered itself. He had seen a notice of his wife's death in a Kentucky newspaper, subsequently of Miss Bent's, and learned from another source, that she had bequeathed the whole of her little property to her nephew, William Bent. He was too proud to come back as a dependent upon his grandfather's charity, even should the latter relent toward him, and he wandered about—in his choice phraseology, "cropping a promiscuous vegetation," and living mostly by his wits, until he read Dr. Stanton's obituary in the public prints, when he concluded to make himself known to his mother.

He did not pretend that his career had been one of respectability, much less of honor, during his exile. He had

"acted just as any other fellow, disowned and desperate, would have done." He "made no pretensions to saintliness, and saints, if secure from exposure by name, and against loss of character, would soon degenerate into sinners. But he had sowed, reaped and thrashed his wild oats, and meant now to set up for morality of the most approved kind—morality of such an irreproachable type, as should make his future a spotless record, and leave a surplus of whitewash with which to coat past peccadilloes." This was the substance of the rattling narrative, which he detailed in the street, in the offices and stores of acquaintances; upon hotel steps, and within hotel bars—wherever, in short, he met with audience fit and curious.

He had never told it with more spirit than upon one forenoon, about a week after his return, to a knot of genteel loafers congregated in the office of Mr. Lee, who was one of the principal lawyers of the place. This gentleman had sat at his desk apparently engaged in writing, while the story was in progress. He raised his head at the close, to say in a caustic tone:

"You will find it a tough job to make your whitewash weather-proof, so long as Jack Wilson is your bosom friend. A man can't touch pitch like that, and not be defiled."

Hartley laughed. He sat upon the edge of a table swinging his foot, a cigar between his white, firm teeth; the picture of manly yet indolent beauty.

"Wilson isn't just the species of pet lamb to whom a personage of my prospective respectability would care to give the run of his grounds, particularly if there were women and children about. But, like a certain intimate friend of his who shall be nameless to ears polite, he is not so black as he is painted. He stood by me when better people were ready to kick me out of doors. Our friendship had a stormy commencement. You remember I fought

him before we had known one another a month; but he has borne me no malice for the flogging he got then. I had to give him a second drubbing ten times worse, five months afterward, to teach him his place. He looks like a bull-dog, but he belongs rather to the spaniel race, and has thriven upon the beatings. Since he has learned his lesson, we have gone on swimmingly together. He is staying here now, awaiting my convenience to dissolve our partnership."

"He is not very heavily in your debt, I imagine," said Lee, dryly as before.

"Not to a ruinous amount! You are right there! Jack beats me hollow at financiering. But I shall pay him off in a few days and declare quits. Name of either member of the firm to be used in the settlement of the business."

"Pitch-sticks!" rejoined Lee, writing away at his papers.

"Then a stick of another description must be used in getting rid of it! The third time never fails. I have no fear lest matters should come to that pass, however; Jack, like most of his tribe, is a leech that drops off easily when gorged."

"You may have trouble in getting enough of the wherewithal to satisfy him," observed another of the party. "That is, if your grandfather's estate is to furnish it. There is a will, you know."

"Which isn't worth that!" snapping his fingers. "I could break it like a burnt thread, if it were brought into court."

"Better not try it! I have seen it. Fry is the executor, and he showed it to me. It will hold water!" cautioned Lee.

Hartley had taken the one glass too much that converts a talkative into a garrulously indiscreet man, and the subject was stirring.

"We will see about that! We will learn whether the

idiotic mutterings of a dying man, translated and written down by a sneaking parson——"

"None of that while you are in here!" put in Lee, without the least appearance of excitement. "If you want to call names go out upon the sidewalk, and I will come to you there!"

"I don't see what you have got to do with the affair;" retorted Hartley. "It is very easy to keep cool when somebody else has been cheated, but when the shoe pinches your own foot it is altogether a different thing. This Thorne is an officious, meddling scoundrel, and I mean to tell him so. I will say it whenever I choose."

"I don't want to hurt you, or to be rude in my own house; but so sure as your name is Hartley and mine is Lee, I will throw you out of that door, neck and crop, if you say another disrespectful word of Mr. Thorne!" said Lee, rising and speaking with the phlegmatic deliberation peculiar to him in scenes where other men would have lost their tempers entirely.

"You will do no such thing, if you please, Mr. Lee!" said a deep, calm voice that made all present start.

Thorne had come in at the side-door in time to hear the last remark, and now advanced into the middle of the room.

"I am obliged to you for defending me in my absence, but since I am here, there is no longer a need for your generous championship. If Mr. ——, if any one of these gentlemen has any cause of complaint against me, I prefer to discuss it in private, and in cool blood, before the matter is made the talk of the community. I trust that no one will ever find me disposed to shirk the responsibility of my actions."

He bowed, and would have withdrawn, but Hartley broke out coarsely, inflamed by drink and rage:

"That is all very fine, but I have seen other men before now, who would lie upon oath, aye, and who wouldn't choke

at such a monstrous camel as a forgery, whose conscientious windpipes closed up at the idea of a quarrel with a gentleman. That is your kind exactly!"

Thorne's features settled rigidly—the white heat is always fearful to behold. Perhaps twenty seconds went by before he unclosed his lips. Then his tones were low and measured, almost gentle.

"I repeat what I have said, Mr. Hartley. If I have offended, or in any manner injured you, I am ready to account to you at the proper time and place. Respect for your family would restrain me from a causeless and violent rupture with you, unless it were absolutely unavoidable."

"Why don't you own up at once, and say that your deeds cannot bear the light? Wills made in private, with fictitious codicils added at the dictation of a speechless and dying man, suit your taste better; and lording it like a prince over a house in which you have no more right to authority than the meanest negro in the cabins has; worming yourself into the confidence of foolish women and graybeards, and prying into family secrets!"

"Will you shut your mouth, or shall I do it for you?" demanded Lee, moving toward the speaker.

"Stay!" Thorne laid his hand upon his arm, in no light pressure, for the bones slipped and ached under it. "This is my affair, and I do not desire to embroil any friends. When Mr. Hartley has time to think the subject over, he will acknowledge the expediency of the postponement I have demanded."

"Demanded!" replied Hartley with an oath. "You are a pretty one to lay down the law, to 'demand' of your betters! I will not let you bully me any sooner than I would let you swindle me out of my rights!"

"Shame!" "Hartley! be quiet!" said some of the bystanders.

Lee's dry, cutting remarks intercepted Thorne's rejoinder. "You are a better judge of what constitutes bullying than any of the rest of us, if practice makes perfect in knowledge, as in action. But opinions on this head vary with latitudes. Here we consider it bullying of the most cowardly kind to blackguard a clergyman; although it certainly has the recommendation of safety, and that may be an important consideration to some people."

Hartley sneered in scornful, bitter mirth, through his clenched teeth:

"Your valiant knight shelters himself behind his cloth, does he?"

"His cloth is just now the only protection you have!" responded Lee, trying to undo Thorne's fingers from his arm. He might as well have wrestled with iron clamps.

"Do you want me to fight you first?" he said, half angrily, half in jest, to his friend.

"I mean that there shall be no fighting at all, on my account. Mr. Hartley—since you will have an explanation in the hearing of others—will you be so kind as to specify what offence I have offered your feelings; what attempt I have made to undermine your lawful rights? Let us act like reasonable men—not irrational animals!"

"Agreed!" Hartley dropped back to his seat upon the table, with a laugh whose malignity was made fiendish by his scowl. "I, Henry Hartley, do hereby, in the presence of these witnesses, accuse you, Rev. Something, Thorne—that's the legal rigmarole, isn't it, Lee?—with having taken advantage of my grandfather's imbecility, to draw up a fraudulent will, depriving me of all share in his estate—and, lest your diabolical schemes should be frustrated by the natural affection or common sense of the rightful heiress of the whole, you framed and annexed a codicil, making hers merely a life-interest in the property. There is your indict-

ment as plainly as I can put it! What have you to say to it?"

"In the first place—I suggest the improbability that I should have taken so much trouble to exclude a dead man from participation in any earthly possession. I believed that you had lain in the bottom of the Mississippi river for five years."

"That is a lie! you know that you wrote—" He checked whatever was to have followed, evidently confused at his inadvertence. But it added to his rage. "Where was the use of writing that codicil, then?"

"That I cannot tell you. I simply complied with Dr. Stanton's directions, knowing as I did, that he never acted without a reason, and a good one, for his conduct."

"A good reason!" another curse. "As if you were not aware, all the while, that he was no more competent to make a will than an idiot would have been! that his mind was utterly destroyed, and he a silly tool in your hands!"

"That I deny!" returned Thorne, with unruffled composure. "I know that Dr. Stanton was sound in mind, when I wrote the body of the will from his dictation. It is my firm conviction that he was as sane, when he added the codicil, as I am this hour, and in this belief I am supported by others who were with him at the time. That he spoke indistinctly, was in consequence of extreme debility, and possibly, a partial paralysis of the tongue. I cannot put the preposterous character of your charges against me in a stronger light, than by asking a question or two, in my turn. Why, since he was the helpless instrument of my will, did I not secure a legacy for myself? What imaginable benefit could I derive from the bequest of five thousand dollars to Miss Stanton, or a larger amount to your brother-in-law? If I were the deep schemer you represent me to

be, would I not have contrived to appropriate a lion's share of the property I gave away?"

To the surprise of the lookers-on, Hartley started up in a raging passion.

"You smooth-tongued rascal! you understand as well as I do, why I will not expose the depth and blackness of your villainy, here! You have a long head, and it keeps a sharp eye to the future; but I swear to you, that sooner than your presumption should be rewarded as you are hoping it will be, I would blow your brains out!"

He plucked his right hand from his bosom and levelled a pistol at Thorne's head, who stood motionless, facing death with an unblenching front. Not so the rest of the group. There was a general outcry of horror and indignation, and an instant rush toward the madman. The pistol was discharged in the scuffle—the ball whizzing past Thorne's ear, and burying itself in the wall. He had the presence of mind to lock the door, to exclude the crowd that might be attracted from the street by the report;—then his powerful voice arose above the din of angry reproaches and defiant curses.

"Mr. Lee, you will oblige me by allowing that gentleman to rise!"

The lawyer, a wiry athlete, whose constitutional phlegm had contributed more than principle toward preventing him from becoming the boxer of the region, had thrown his man, and was holding him down, with his knee upon his chest; two others taking care of the hands and feet.

"Not until I bind him over to keep the peace!" returned that individual. "I am a lawyer, and this sort of thing is contrary to law. Moreover, it is against my conscience."

It may safely be assumed, that Hartley had never heard a more unwelcome sound than the laugh that succeeded this remark. His position was humiliating and disgraceful, to

the last degree. A bully he was, but no craven. In a fair fight, he would have engaged to whip the whole half-dozen of his assailants—one by one. By force of superior numbers, they had overpowered him and made him ridiculous.

"If you don't let me get up, you pack of cowards! I will alarm the town!" he vociferated, writhing mightily beneath his captors.

"Do!" said Lee, approvingly. "They will enjoy the sight—and the story! Will you swear to keep the peace!"

"Never!"

"Then we'll spend the rest of the day here, boys! It is as comfortable for us as for him."

"All right!" and another roar of laughter.

The tragic was completely merged in the ludicrous. It cannot be called strange, because it was human nature, that, as his eye rolled from one grinning face to another, the impotent wrath of the vanquished man should burn most hotly against the grave, anxious one that pressed forward to a place close beside him.

"Gentlemen, I beg, as a personal favor to myself, that Mr. Hartley may be released at once, and unconditionally. If you require security for his peaceable treatment of myself in future, I am ready to offer it."

The authoritative request had its effect. Thorne had too much tact to assist his fallen adversary to his feet when his living manacles were removed, nor did he offer to speak to him before he rushed sullenly into the street. But he cast a look of rebuke and entreaty upon Lee, who shot a Parthian arrow after the defeated bully.

"I say, Hartley, there isn't much whitewash to spare, as yet!"

"We regret exceedingly this shameful occurrence, Mr. Thorne," said a member of the party.

"You cannot deplore it more sincerely than I do, Mr. Rice!"

"Your conduct was noble—admirable, sir!" observed another, shaking hands with him.

He felt what he said, knowing all the while that he would, in like circumstances, have acted very differently. In our day, as in Solomon's, it is easier to take a city than to rule one's own spirit.

Thorne waited for no more apologies or congratulations. Retaining to the last the dignified composure that had withstood insult and personal violence—had not sunk to the meanness of exultation over an humbled foe, but had accomplished his liberation, he bowed silently to the company, and walked up the street to his study. Arrived there, he threw his hat upon the floor, as if the cincture about his temples made their throbbings intolerable, and sat down to the table, binding his forehead with his hands.

"God grant me patience!"

The tense muscles leaped into startling relief, and locked his lips. Not for one instant was there an unhallowed regret that he had not obeyed the urgent promptings of passion —answered reviling with contumely, and insult with blows. But his proud spirit smarted and burned at the remembrance of the opprobrium heaped upon him. The strength that had restrained him from a sacrifice of character and religion to the desire for revenge, was not his own—yet there had mingled with the superhuman support a strain of human feeling. From no other man alive could he have endured so well what he had borne that day from Miriam's brother. Yes! her brother! and unworthy though he was, steeped to the lips in profligacy and sin, of which she knew not even the name—she loved him. She daily thanked heaven for his return, and—mistaken girl! for his reformation! Upon his breast she had suffered her tears to fall, as she filled his

ears with her sacred memories of her lost boy—*his* too! She leaned upon his arm and hung about his neck in sisterly caressings. Thorne saw these things every day—almost every hour, when he was at home—always with the same dull aching and swelling of heart. Hartley would tell her this disgraceful story—he, and no one else—for who would dare speak to her of her brother's fault and its punishment? Not Neale Thorne, were it to spare himself the misery of being contemned in her sight—spurned from her presence forever. That presence he must leave—and without delay. After what had transpired, Mrs. Hartley's house was no longer his home.

Drear desolation—associations whose very sweetness made them afflicting pangs, like the farewell throes of soul and body—wrought in the travail of this resolution, but it lived through all the anguish. Without an attempt at self-justification—without an appeal to tried integrity and unselfish services, he must collect his effects and depart. He could not, and ought not, to spend another night under the dear old roof—the shelter to which its master had bidden him welcome not a year ago.

"Until you bring Mrs. Thorne to the Parsonage!" This was the term of limitation settled upon for his residence there. From the study window he could see the peaked gables of the Gothic cottage, tenantless since the removal of the former pastor. He might install Gertrude there as mistress, and thus secure for himself an abiding-place. He sickened at the suggestion. Not yet! not yet! His dream was dead, and its death had been violent—but a little space for mourning over the beautiful corse before his own hands dug its grave and buried it forever from his eyes!

Three hours had passed since the affray. The town was full of it—but the busy waves of gossip were unheard and unthought of by him who wandered up and down the lonely

study, or sat by the table littered with untouched papers, ruminating sadly upon the clouds that had pressed closely upon one another over his pathway within the last few months, trying to brace spirit and heart to meet the coming sorrow of parting and permanent separation. The yellow rays of the westering sun gilded the wall, when he unlocked the door, at a knock from without, and saw Mr. Fry.

"Walk in! I am glad to see you!" said Thorne, his face kindling at sight of this true friend.

"And I am sorry for the immediate occasion of my visit," returned the visitor, taking the proffered chair. "I have heard the history of Harry Hartley's dastardly conduct, from Lee, whose indignation is rather deep than loud. It only verifies my wife's prediction, that that wretched young man would not be at home a week before he made the community and his relatives heartily sorry that he had escaped drowning. She will have it that he is one of those who are not born to die by water. I met him ten minutes ago, swaggering down the street, with a cigar in his mouth, and his hand in his waistcoat, doubtless grasping a pistol for the first one who should dare to remind him of his recent downfall. He is a sad, sad fellow! As the friend of his mother and sister, I am here to thank you for your generous forbearance to him. As your friend, I would like to know what course you intend to pursue hereafter—whether this affair will alter your relations to the family, or your present residence?"

"The latter must be changed, certainly. I fear the other result will ensue upon Mr. Hartley's representations to his friends, of the altercation—an impression I cannot contradict."

"They shall hear the truth, whether they believe it or not. I will attend to that, and I am much mistaken in them, if they allow this braggart's vaporing to outweigh their sense of what they owe to you."

"They owe me nothing. I have received far more than I have given. Whatever may be their judgment of this miserable affair, you must perceive the necessity of my leaving Mrs. Hartley's."

"I do. Fanny was sure that you would not remain there. It is her earnest desire, as it is mine, that you shall return immediately with me to our home, and consider it, from this time forth, as yours."

"You are more than kind. This is better than hospitality, Mr. Fry! There is no other house upon earth in which I would so soon, or so gratefully, take refuge in this emergency. I thank you, from my inmost soul, for your offer, but there are cogent reasons why I should not accept it, much as my heart longs, in its home-sickness, to do so. As Mrs. Hartley's man of business, she will often wish to consult you in person, and call at your residence for that purpose. Mrs. Fry's friendship and society are so important—I may say so necessary to Miss Hartley's comfort, that I should be basely inconsiderate and selfish were I to present an obstacle to her free enjoyment of these, by becoming an inmate of your dwelling."

Mr. Fry remonstrated, without success, against this act of self-denial. Thorne was keenly appreciative of his motives, and unfeignedly thankful for his offer, but immovable in his declinature. Before going back to his late quarters, he called upon a widow, a member of his church, who was the proprietress of a private boarding-house, and engaged a room in her establishment. Mr. Fry accompanied him on this errand, and they walked on together, as far as the gate of the last-named gentleman. There Thorne left him, promising to return to supper, and pursued his solitary way toward what was for him no longer a home.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHANGES.

"You can do as you like, of course! This is your house, and I am a poor dog, who has neither houses, land, nor money. Yet, poor as I am, there is too much of my father's blood in my veins to allow me to cross this threshold again, until that rascal quits these premises forever!"

Such was Henry Hartley's parting speech to his mother, after having given her a mendaciously garbled account of the fracas in the lawyer's office. In the shadow of this cloud had the poor lady sat and wept, the livelong afternoon. As dusk drew near, she sent for Cousin Clarice.

The confidante answered the summons tardily and reluctantly. The diplomatist was fairly "upon the fence"—poised totteringly, in dismayed incertitude upon which side to alight. In him, who was likely to make himself virtual lord of the manor, she had not an atom of confidence. From his youth she had known him to be the tool of his unbridled passions—bold, unscrupulous, and selfish, when the interests of others militated against his own. She knew, furthermore, that he bore her no good-will; that the boy had hated her for her meddlesome prying into his faults; the youth had cursed her to her face, for attempting to influence his mother to oppose his imprudent and ill-starred marriage; the man had not forgotten her officious advice, the ominous sighs and tears, that had protested against his downward career. In those early days there was nothing to be gained by counte-

nancing his enormities—but if she were to oppose him now, in ever so trifling a degree, his imperial ukase might be issued for her banishment. She had intended to abide with "poor Cousin Edith" for an indefinite period—uncertain, because bounded by one of two proverbially uncertain events—matrimony, and the end of the natural life. She was a genuine little voluptuary, in her modest way. Warm, well-furnished rooms; soft beds; food, rich and dainty; a well-appointed equipage, conduced marvellously to her comfort of body and spirit. She liked to have plenty of servants at her beck and call; to flit through noble rooms, and down spacious staircases, and fancy, for the nonce, that Clarice Stanton was mistress of the goodly array—supreme and irresponsible. In the unpretending establishment of her brother-in-law, her position was comparatively subordinate and uncomfortable. The child of this generation was quite ready to join in the loyal acclaim, "*Le roi est mort! Vive le roi!*" only—would her welfare be subserved, in the long run, by this act of allegiance? She disliked Neale Thorne; she had done him a vast deal of harm, with a hearty will, and if she had permitted her reason to be swayed by vulgar feeling, would have gloried in working out his thorough discomfiture. As yet, not a breath of the illegality imputed to the will by the grandson, had reached the testator's family; yet Cousin Clarice's intuition warned her against decided partisanship, until her pockets were heavier, and her heart lightened of its suspense. With which Mammon of unrighteousness should she make friends?

While Mrs. Hartley, with moans and tears, and simple-minded prayers, had revolved the question of her duty in the strait forced upon her, her bosom counsellor had ploughed and harrowed her fertile brain in quest of some expedient by which she could remain at peace and in amity with both parties. Still vacillating, she entered the council-chamber,

and listened, with distracted thoughts, to the mother's fears, the hostess' regrets.

Finally came the question, "Now, Clarice, what can I do?"

And—an occurrence deserving mention for its rarity—Cousin Clarice answered honestly—"I am sure I cannot tell!"

Mrs. Hartley was struck mute. If this ready reed failed her, upon what could she rely? After a pause, Cousin Clarice subjoined a few safe truisms.

"It is a very unfortunate occurrence—doubly distressing because of its publicity. Both were to blame—both indiscreet and hot-headed!"

"True!" sighed Mrs. Hartley.

"If either could be induced to apologize—" ventured the other.

"Harry never will! If you had seen him to-day, when he snatched up his hat and left the house—if you had heard him—you would not indulge that hope for an instant. You know how resolute he has always been—poor boy!"

Her overweening partiality for her eldest-born; her pride in his beauty and talents; her leniency to his failings; her palliation and concealment of his crimes, was the rock upon which Mrs. Hartley's earthly happiness had split. The healthful restraint of his grandfather's authority was rendered nugatory by her unwise indulgence. She screened and defended him, by every means which the cunning of affection could devise, and, secure of this protection, the boy had grown up in rank luxuriance of vice. His power over her transcended that of any other mortal, and the short week he had now spent with her had sufficed to revive this, in all its force.

"Do you think that Mr. Thorne would be willing to offer an explanation to Harry, if I were to ask him?" she pursued, in timid anxiety.

"Um—um! I cannot undertake to foretell the result of such an application. You might try it!"

A quick step came along the passage; the door was opened hurriedly, and Miriam appeared, in a walking-dress, her cheeks flushed, and eyes brilliant with excitement and exercise.

"Mamma!" she began, without waiting to recover her breath, "I have been to Mr. Fry's, to get the truth of this matter. I was sure that Henry was not the most proper person to give a just account of the quarrel. Fanny told me all about it, and as I was getting ready to come home, Mr. Fry came in and made me sit down again. He walked up home with me, that he might finish the story. He had it directly from Mr. Lee and two other gentlemen, who were present from the beginning to the end of the conversation. They all agree in acquitting Mr. Thorne of blame. Henry forced questions and abuse upon him, and he replied with the utmost moderation, repeatedly entreating Henry not to enter upon a public quarrel, but to bring his complaint to him in private, and promising him whatever satisfaction he could give. Henry deceived us grossly as to the subject of the dispute. It was not that he was provoked by Mr. Thorne's 'lordly airs of authority' here, and his 'arrogance' to himself abroad, and 'could not help showing his disrelish of such behavior.' The question of discussion was the validity of Grandpapa's will, which Henry declares he will contest in open court."

Cousin Clarice uttered an exclamation of horror.

"I did not see that you were here!" said Miriam, turning around. "But since you have heard a part, you may as well have the rest. Henry accused Mr. Thorne, Mamma, of having perpetrated an infamous fraud; of imposing upon Grandpapa while he was incapable of transacting business; of interpreting falsely his words and gestures; and when

Mr. Thorne calmly refuted these charges, by inquiring what motive he could have had in committing the crime, Henry assailed him with furious abuse, and drew a pistol upon him. Then it was that Mr. Lee—not instigated by Mr. Thorne, as we were told, but to save his friend's life—seized Henry and disarmed him. Moreover, it was at Mr. Thorne's request that he was set at liberty. He declared to us that he had to fight his way through the crowd, who were pressing upon him. But for Mr. Thorne, he would have been committed to prison for a breach of the peace."

"Miriam! I am astonished at you!" said Mrs. Hartley, with unusual sternness. "Can you believe these charges against your brother!"

"I would not, if I could help it, Mamma! I felt that Harry's passion misled him in the story he gave us. I knew that Mr. Thorne was a Christian and a gentleman—a man of honor and courage, and that, had these qualities been overcome by sudden excitement under provocation, his friendship for our family would never have suffered him to assail your son and Willie's father, with insulting words—much less with bodily violence."

"You had more confidence in him than in *your brother*, then?" rejoined Mrs. Hartley, with reproachful emphasis.

"Oh, Mamma! Mamma! Loving Harry as I do, and must, it almost breaks my heart to admit it—but what reason have we for believing his word in opposition to probability and the solemn affirmation of three competent witnesses? Let us judge without prejudice, when the innocent is falsely accused!"

"You were right, Clarice!" Mrs. Hartley arose, her wan cheek tinged with the red of maternal anger at this aspersion of her favorite child. "You were not mistaken in saying that this girl's sentiments toward Mr. Thorne are not those of ordinary friendship. Nothing but love—and infatuated

fondness at that—can account for this unnatural attack upon her own kindred—this passionate defence of a mere stranger. It is unbecoming—immodest! I will hear no more of it!"

"My dearest Cousin!" cried Cousin Clarice, breathlessly, "Mr. Thorne is her pastor, the dear and trusted friend of our beloved, departed father! Surely she is justifiable if she hesitates to condemn him unheard. Remember there must be another side to this affair. Let us hear both!"

"And you, too, have become his advocate!" The meek woman was aroused to fiery boldness. "Not four months ago you cautioned me not to trust too implictly to one of whom we knew only what he chose to tell us. Now, you would have me cherish him, and cast off my own child—my long-lost boy! I see through it all. It is a conspiracy to drive my son from the home of his fathers. It is not enough that he will be a beggar, at my death, but you must grudge him the little I can do for him, while we are spared to one another! Oh, yes! It is a deep scheme, but a mother's eyes are very keen! If he goes, I shall go with him!"

Cousin Clarice was appalled—as are most people, when one of these long-suffering, submissive women is goaded to vehement and unreasoning anger. Having witnessed several such exhibitions in the course of my life—outbreaks equally unlooked-for and revolting—I have formed a private theory upon the subject, which has made me rather seek intimates among the franker and more spunky sort—those who exercise their tempers sufficiently often to understand the management of them, when they try to get the upper hand. I once had the unhappiness of seeing the gentlest woman alive—or such was her reputation—in a rage, and the shaking frame, the shrill invectives, shrieked at the top of her voice; the bloodless, foaming lips; the discolored face, have left an impression upon my mind, akin to the disgustful horror one might feel, if the snowy-fleeced lamb,

that was to him as a daughter, were suddenly to turn upon the caressing hand with the wide-mouthed fury of a rabid dog.

Cousin Clarice recoiled, with a whimper of wounded sensibility. Miriam stood her ground, the Hartley spirit upborne by a proud consciousness of rectitude, that reminded one whose grandchild she was.

"You have never spoken such words to me before, Mamma, nor shall I treasure them up now. You do not mean what you say. You will see presently how impossible it is, that I should wish you to discard Harry, or to punish him in any manner, for what was an angry and I hope inadvertent misrepresentation. Mr. Fry tells me that Mr. Thorne has engaged a boarding-place in Limestone; that he is in his room at this moment, preparing for his departure. I had no intention of persuading you to invite him to remain. I could not respect him if he consented to sleep another night in this house. I do say, however, that the least we—the least *you* can do, in memory of his goodness to those we have loved and lost, is to express regret at the separation, and a belief in his integrity; to absolve him from blame in this unhappy transaction. I do not ask you to condemn your son, in performing an act of common justice. As to the insinuation, which I would have scorned to notice had it not been sanctioned by your lips—you will not repeat it when you are calmer. It is unworthy of any mother—most unworthy of mine! Unless you desire it particularly, I shall not see Mr. Thorne before he goes. You can say 'Farewell' to him for me."

She was going out.

"My daughter!" Mrs. Hartley's wrath was subsiding in a flow of tears.

"Did you call me, Mamma?"

"Yes, my dear. This is a dreadful business!"

Miriam said nothing. Cousin Clarice groaned behind her cambric.

"Cannot *you* see Mr. Thorne, daughter, and tell him all that ought to be said? I am afraid that I should fail in the attempt. It may be that my love for poor Harry blinds me, in a measure, but I cannot feel as cordially toward him as I used to do."

"That is not his fault, Mamma. He is the same man who watched by Willie's bedside and closed his eyes; the same intrepid friend who sought your father that terrible stormy night, and saved him from perishing in the cold; who scarcely left his bedside until all was over; whose tender tact and diligent offices of kindness, I have heard you say you could never repay. In remembrance of these things, do not let him go from your doors like an outcast. Forget the living and erring, and think of the upright dead. How would Grandpapa have had you act toward one he so loved and honored?"

She was not flushed or eager now, but her eye was brighter; her voice rang like a bell.

"What do you think, Clarice?"

"That our dear Miriam is in the right. I will meet Mr. Thorne with you, and complete what you would say, if your feelings overcome you."

"As you like," rejoined Miriam, quitting the room.

The unnatural self-control was not relaxed until she reached her own room. Fumbling dizzily for the key, that she might lock herself in, she felt herself encompassed by a whirling night, and fell to the floor.

Thorne had just emerged from his chamber into the upper hall, having completed his preparations, and dispatched his sorrowful helper, Parker, to request an interview with Mrs. Hartley, in the parlor. He heard the dull concussion in the apartment opposite his, and stopped, for a second, to listen.

Every thing was quiet, and it was with a very slight and vague sense of uneasiness, that he said to Parker, whom he met below, "I heard a noise, as of something falling, in Miss Miriam's room. You had better send some one to see whether a stick has not rolled from the fire upon the floor."

A sharp pain stabbed his heart at the reflection that he should never issue another order in that household; that this simple injunction would be deemed officious, if it were overheard by the authorized rulers.

Luckily, Parker's "some one" was his own wife, on her way up-stairs, with a pile of finished work, she being the family seamstress. Her he ordered to her young mistress' room, he hanging anxiously about the foot of the staircase, to gather what auguries he could from Mrs. Hartley's demeanor, as she passed through the hall to the parlor. It could not be that she would let Mr. Thorne go, resolute as he seemed to depart! She came, leaning upon Cousin Clarice's arm—pale, nervous, almost tearful. The butler gave a groan as the door closed after them.

"Oh! the mis*chief* one high-tempered pairson can perduce in the best reg'lated fam'lies!"

"Parker! Parker!" called an agitated voice at the stair-head. "Come up here, directly!"

The docile spouse obeyed.

"There's somethin' a'ginst Miss Mir'um's door. Somethin' or somebody! Won't you try to open it?"

He was thin, and his wife fleshy, and when, by dint of pushing, he had made an aperture of sufficient width to admit his body, he slipped in. Then she heard an exclamation, and the door was clapped to, in her face. It unclosed easily at her next effort to effect an entrance. The obstruction—whatever it had been—was removed, and her husband stood by the bed, trying, with clumsy fingers, to untie the bonnet of his young mistress, who lay in a dead faint.

"Hush!" said the faithful fellow, seeing that his wife was about to scream. "Don't call a soul, Rhody. Jest bring her to as fast as you can, and keep a close mouth. There's terrible dealin's goin' on sence Mars' Harry come home. It's a pity he's got nothin' Hartley about him, besides his face!"

Rhoda was a skilful nurse, and her ready remedies soon restored the swooning girl.

"Lie still, please, Miss Mir'um, dear!" she begged coaxingly, as Miriam stared in bewilderment about her, and would have started up. "You've had a little faint spell—but it's over now."

"Brought on by comin' too sudden out of the cold into a warm room," explained Parker, with a parade of plausibility.

"Jes' so!" assented Rhoda. "I've been often 'ffected in the same manner myself. It makes my head whirl like a hummin' top, and de fust thing I know—over I go!"

"And we thought 'twasn't wuth while to 'larm Mistis nor Miss Clarice!" chimed in Parker.

"You were right. Thank you! Say nothing to them about it. I am much better now."

She turned her face to the wall. Parker withdrew, and his wife made a pretence of arranging the fire; but her poking and stirring did not hinder her from hearing a few heavy sobs from the bed, or noticing that, when the outer door clanged to, and a manly tread resounded upon the porch and crushed the gravel, Miriam raised her head from the pillow, and listened so long as the faintest footfall could be distinguished.

The dreaded interview had passed off less painfully and awkwardly than Mrs. Hartley had anticipated. Thorne met the two ladies with the grave courtesy he knew so well how to wear, and entered promptly upon the business in hand.

"It is unnecessary, Mrs. Hartley, that I should distress you by recapitulating the reasons that compel me to leave a home which has been so delightful to me. Your son has, I suppose, informed you of their nature."

Mrs. Hartley bowed, affirmatively.

"The amount of my indebtedness to you, I will deposit, as I have done heretofore, in Mr. Fry's hands, subject to your order. It only remains for me to thank you for your great and uniform kindness to me from the day I entered your doors, as a stranger, to the present hour. I shall always remember my residence in your family with deep gratitude, and if there should ever arise any occasion in which I can be of service to you, I trust that you will command me. I should regard any intimation to this effect, as a compliment and a kindness."

He arose to take leave.

"Will you not stay to supper, Mr. Thorne?" faltered Mrs. Hartley, in pitiable confusion.

"No, thank you, madam. I have promised to take that meal at Mr. Fry's."

"I hope you have succeeded in obtaining an eligible boarding place," remarked Cousin Clarice, solicitously.

"I have taken a room at Mrs. Scott's."

"Ah! a pleasant location, and I should think an agreeable set of boarders! We are extremely sorry that you are to leave us, Mr. Thorne. We regard this separation as an additional affliction, superadded to those that have recently clouded our hearts and homes."

Thorne's reply was a bow, and his eyes wandered to Mrs. Hartley, as expecting some word of kindly regret from her. Her response to the silent appeal was but lame and stiff.

"We are much obliged to you for all you have done for us this winter, Mr. Thorne. We shall miss you."

"I hope not, madam!" He drew himself up haughtily at her tone.

"But we shall!" insisted Cousin Clarice's velvety accents. "You must come and see us very often, if only to show that we parted friends."

"My conscience assures me, that I have done nothing that ought to deprive me of the title of your friend, Mrs. Hartley." He held out his hand. "My regard for yourself and interest in your welfare are unchanged, and unchangeable. Please present my respects to Miss Hartley. Good-night, ladies!"

Cousin Clarice and Mrs. Hartley gazed at one another, with the expression of two people who had performed a would-be polite action in a very shabby manner.

"There! neither of us delivered Miriam's adieux!" exclaimed the younger lady, and ran out into the hall.

She was too late. His retreating footsteps were all that she heard. It is not uncharitable to assume that she did not break her heart over the thought of her negligence, and that there was some other incentive to the composition of a note, which Thorne was called from Mrs. Fry's parlor that evening to receive.

"My Dear Mr. Thorne—My cousin, Mrs. Hartley, is distressed by fears that she should have failed, from the very excess of her emotion, to express her *unfeigned* sorrow at your departure. We *all* feel that we have sustained an irreparable loss, and deplore the stroke the more, in the remembrance of the *fatal* indiscretion that has occasioned it. Your abundant charity will make allowance for the partial judgment of a mother's love, that hopes against hope, for the reformation of a dear and only son.

"Our dear M—— has defended you *nobly*, and remains your firm advocate. I forgot, in the agitation of the mo-

ment, this evening, to present with mine, the assurances of her esteem, and the adieux with which she charged me. Do not desert us utterly. Come as often as you can—*when H—— is out of the house.* He spends, alas! *too little* of his time at home. Do not, I beseech you, punish the innocent with the guilty!

"Gratefully and sincerely,

"CLARICE STANTON."

Thorne perused the black-edged, musky sheet by the hall lamp.

"It requires no answer, Parker," he said to the bearer. "It is all right!"

"And you've r'ally left us, for good and all, Mr. Thorne?" queried the man, coming a step nearer.

"Yes, Parker."

"Maybe this trouble will blow over, sir, so's you can come back. We set a mighty deal of store by you, Mr. Thorne."

"I am obliged to you for saying so. It is not because I am dissatisfied with my home, or the people in it, that I have removed. I like to believe that you will continue to think of, and to like me."

"I 'stributed the money you left with me, sir, among the colored folks, and they are very thankful to you, sir. Some on 'em cried out, like babies, when I gave it to 'em. You've left a mournin' house, Mr. Thorne, we'd come to look up to you, as if you was our sure-enough master."

"But I was not—and perhaps it is best for you, and for me, to see things as they really are. Good bye."

"One minute, if you please, sir!" Parker fingered his hat, confusedly. "It's not my place, maybe, and she mightn't like it p'raps—but I can't b'ar the idea of your thinkin' hard of her, sir. It 'curred to me, and so it did to

Rhody, sir, that you might 'a thought it strange that Miss Mir'um didn't come down to say 'far'well' to you, this evening—seein' as how you've been seeh frien's together. But the fac' of the truth is, she weren't able, Mr. Thorne. You rec'llect speakin' to me of hearin' somethin' fall in her room, as you went down sta'rs, sir? I sent Rhody in to see what it was, and she called to me that she couldn't open the door. So I squeezed in, sir, and there lay Miss Mir'um, in a desperate hard faint."

"What!"

"'Twas so, sir! but you needn't be skeered, sir! We brung—*brought* her to, 'thout callin' any help, and she's quite well again. But she ain't so strong as she used to was, and that's another reason I'm sorry you've come away, sir. She wants more lookin' after than she'll git now. Mars' Henry was always Mistis' pet, and Miss Clarice—well—no disrespect to her, sir, but *she* aint likely to pet Miss Mir'um."

"Then *you* must watch over her, Parker! Make her take regular but not violent exercise, and do whatever you can to cheer her and spare her annoyance. And remember this, my man! I know I can rely upon you to attend to what is your secret and mine—if she should fall sick, or any great trouble come upon her, I must know it at once!"

"I understand, sir! You won't let on to her that I've told you any thing, sir? She is partickler about some things, you know, and I would be sorry to displeasure her."

"I shall not mention it. Say nothing to her of having seen me—and now, good-night! Be prudent and faithful!"

Mrs. Fry directed her conversation exclusively to her husband, while their guest was wrapped in the reverie that absorbed him, for a time, after his return to the parlor. He stood on the hearth, tearing a sheet of note-paper into strips and watching them consume, as he dropped them into the

fire. One fluttered under the fender, where the housemaid found it next morning, and brought it to her mistress, to see if it were of any value.

It was a single line—"Our dear M—— has defended you *nobly*, and remains your firm advocate."

Mrs. Fry's interjection, as she tossed it into the blaze, was more emphatic than elegant.

"The cat!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

The saddened stillness that reigned throughout his grandfather's late residence, was intolerably irksome to a man of Henry Hartley's disposition and habits. He soon grumbled —inwardly for a while—then aloud, to his mother and sister, at being bored to death by great, empty, echoing rooms, melancholy faces, and subdued tones. He "should hang himself, or cut his throat, if he were obliged to live in this way for a month." He was "perishing" to hear a cheerful laugh, or the sound of merry converse in the old house, once more.

Miriam did violence to her own feelings in summoning a smile at his appearing, and exerting herself to talk freely and pleasantly with him. She proposed rides and walks, and, hardest task of all—music, to chase his ennui. With ingenious assiduity, she contrived some recreation, which she imagined would be agreeable to him, for every hour he spent with the family. There were spicy periodicals, to be read aloud in the evenings; the chess-board; the piano, with his flute laid conspicuously upon it; scrap-books and herbariums to be arranged; always some tempting refreshment, ready to be produced, toward the season for retiring; while she bestowed as much pains upon her toilette as though twenty visitors were expected, instead of her brother alone. Judging him by the only other young man whose preferences she had studied of late, she hoped that these innocent pleas-

ures would attract him to the home fireside; overcome the allurements of the coarser convivialities to be found in the drinking-saloons of the town. Her mistake was in forgetting the disparity in the mental and spiritual natures of the two for whom she catered. Thorne was a hard worker; a conscientious life-laborer; and the intellectual toil of the day prepared him to enjoy the relaxation and simple amusements which the evening brought. Healthy in mind and body; his senses unvitiated by low associations and vicious indulgences, he partook of the pure pleasures of the domestic circle with lively zest, contributing more than he received.

To Hartley, these were vapid, insipid to nauseousness. In theory, the fatted calf and reform were very inviting, but in practice, he discovered that the so-called husks had blunted his appetite; that the family repasts lacked flavor. He had loved music once, and he professed to be as fond of it now, but it was not of the unpretentious sort to be found in a Kentucky manor-house. "When one is accustomed to the opera, all amateur performances are flat!" he alleged, and his flute was put by with a yawn. "Chess was heavy work, unless there were betting to give it a lift." He hated to read aloud, and if Cousin Clarice or Miriam took the book, he fell asleep before the story or review was half finished. Miriam was a "deuced fine girl, but there was no excitement in flirting with a fellow's own sister."

All these symptoms of degraded tastes and a perverted moral sense, Miriam detected and admitted, with a heart whose increasing heaviness fitted her but poorly for the semblance of sprightliness. She could not escape her share of the responsibility, if Henry were driven into forbidden paths by the lack of entertainment in his own household. He was her brother—ruined once, as he said, and his mother believed—ruined, and driven from home, wife and child, by

his grandfather's ill-judged harshness. If he stood firm now; if he were truly and finally rescued, it must be the office of love to accomplish this temporal salvation. One thing she would not ask him to do, and that was, to bring his boon-companions to the house; but this he did, after a time, uninvited. Dr. Stanton had not been dead three months, before it had become quite the fashion in the gayest, not the best circles of Limestone, to get up surprise-parties, and plan excursions, whose rendezvous was Mrs. Hartley's drawing-room. Henry could abide amateur music, when Letty Lewis sang comic songs, and nodded to him to join in the chorus; when she rattled off jigs and polkas, until the windows rang again, and would have seconded his proposal to astonish the grave old room with a dance, "a regular break-down," but for the marked disapproval of others, who had some glimmering sense of propriety left. He ordered Frisk out, whenever he pleased, for Letty's use—her riding-horse being inferior to his sister's—and, without consulting his mother, "traded" one of the finest animals in the stable —the steed appropriated by Dr. Stanton to Thorne's use— for a flashy, high-stepping nag, upon which he might daily be seen, dashing, helter-skelter through the streets, generally in company with David or Letty Lewis, or his infamous crony, Jack Wilson.

For this man Miriam had conceived an intense repugnance. The first evening her brother introduced him into her presence, she was haughty and cool, and expressed her surprise, at his departure, to Henry, that he should wish her to associate with one whose character and profession were so notorious. His rejoinder was a careless laugh and an assurance that "the man was not worse than some others, who made a better show of godliness."

"It is not his want of godliness that I complain of, but his destitution of common respectability—of ordinary morality,"

she replied. "Don't bring him here, again, Harry, please! I should be sorry to wound you, or seem disrespectful to any of your friends, but I cannot receive him upon the footing of a visitor."

"I don't ask you to do it. To tell the truth, I don't care to have him hanging about the house, myself; only it is difficult to get rid of him. I will not ask him again, I promise you. I would not have brought him along to-night, if I could have shaken him off."

Less than a week had elapsed since this conversation, when Miriam was astounded by the appearance of the obnoxious personage, ushered in, as before, by her brother. There were others present at the time, or she would have testified her displeasure, by immediately quitting the apartment. Henry gave her a deprecatory look that besought her forbearance, and appeared, throughout the evening, ill at ease, abstracted and extravagantly gay, by turns. Letty Lewis and her dissipated brother were of the party, and to them Henry was principally devoted. Cousin Clarice monopolized Robert Niles, who chanced to call at the same hour, but not, as may be supposed, in company with the Lewises. Mr. Wilson helped himself to a chair beside Miriam, and began to play the fascinating. A diffident man would not have been encouraged to proceed beyond the prefatory sentence, which earned for him a look that was like steely ice in keenness, glitter and coldness, and a monosyllable that matched it in frigidity; but Mr. Wilson was not diffident or easily rebuffed. He picked his flint courageously, and pulled his trigger again.

He was heavily built, with a bullet head and a bull's neck; stiff, coarse black hair and beard, the latter worn in the latest extreme of foppish luxuriance; eyes, that peered side-long at his fellow-men, as unwilling to meet their direct gaze; thick sensual lips, and a smile, mean yet sinister. Alto-

gether, it would be hard to conceive of a more disagreeable countenance and bearing, or, as Robert Niles thought, in regarding them—a more marked contrast to the lineaments that froze into sternness, at the instant of his entrance. Another and another steel spark flew from her steady eyes, and other curt replies repaid his bland efforts to please and interest her. The crisis of speechless indignation was reached, when he leaned forward, in an attitude which he fancied was particularly graceful, and expressive of a high degree of exclusive, and therefore flattering attention; rested his elbow upon his knee, and his cheek in the hollow of his hand, thus screening her from general observation, and gaining for himself a better view of her face. Instantly, but in dignified wrath, Miriam drew her chair away; got up, and went over to a vacant seat by her mother. Wilson's glowering smile was instinct with evil, and he too exchanged his place for another, nearer the noisy trio of young people.

Letty's lip curled slightly and superciliously, but a compliment or two smoothed out the ruffle, and she smiled benignly upon the new admirer. The most fulsome praise from the most ignoble source did not disgust her. She despised the washerwoman's son, declaring that he carried everywhere with him the odor of yellow soap. Her delicate olfactories were insensitive to the reek of crimes, that no snow-water or fuller's earth could ever cleanse. For a wonder, Henry did not accompany her home. He consigned her to David's care, Wilson guarding her upon the other side. Niles had made his bow long before.

Hartley came back to the parlor, and sat down by the fire in moody silence. His mother kissed him "Good-night," tenderly; Cousin Clarice said it airily, and flitted off. There were left but the brother and sister, neither of whom was disposed to enter upon the discussion they felt was unavoidable.

At length Miriam stole behind her brother's chair, and passed her arm about his neck. She did it with a prayer for guidance, and that the grace of gentleness might not fail her.

"Harry, dear! you did not invite that man here this evening, did you?"

"No. He asked me if he might walk up home with me, and what was I to say?"

"Any thing that would rid you of his society and secure us from his impertinent intrusion."

"That is easier for you to say than for me to do. The fellow has claims upon me, and until they are cancelled, I cannot resent his forwardness."

"Claims! of what nature? Do you owe him money?"

"That is precisely it, child! You were always clever in arriving at a conclusion and speaking it out. You have hit the nail plump and square on the head. I *do* owe him money, and a blamed deal of it."

"How did it happen?"

"Happen!" (derisively.) "Just as it would have happened to any man who was cut adrift without a penny to his name, and with but a single coat to his back—who, having but one friend in the world, should borrow enough from that man to keep him alive for a few months, or years, as the case might be."

"Is that really so? Have you any idea of the amount of your indebtedness? Mamma and I would make any sacrifice to free you. I cannot endure the thought of your being in that man's power. My blood runs cold with disgust whenever I look at him."

"There is no question about his being a grand villain. He has been badgering me all day to pay him, and he knows I am as poverty-stricken as Job's turkey—a disinherited poor devil, who is sponging upon his mother for his daily

bread. I wish I had gone down—sunk like lead, in that muddy river, instead of swimming, like a fool, for a life that wasn't worth the keeping!"

"You can yet make it worthy of your better nature—a comfort to yourself and a blessing to others. But this matter must be attended to forthwith. Why have you delayed speaking to us of your embarrassments?"

"If I had divulged the truth immediately upon my return, would not you—would not the world have said that my repentance was a sham—a *ruse* to extort money? You should not have known any thing about it now, only I am driven to distraction by this scoundrel's importunities. Sit down, Milly, and let me lay my head in your lap! It aches—and no wonder!"

He threw himself along the sofa.

"Poor Harry! poor brother!" said Miriam, softly, threading her fingers through his glossy curls, sweeping their cool tips lightly over his burning eyes and forehead. "You wrong us by this suspicious reserve. What use have I for wealth, except as it can make those whom I love happy? We will arrange it all. In three months I shall be of age. It has been my intention, ever since you came home, to divide my share of Grandpapa's property with you at that time. You know that I cannot touch it until then, without Mr. Fry's consent—can make no permanent disposition of the capital. But Mamma can and will gladly advance whatever is needed to release you from your obligations to this Wilson, and we will repay her when we are able. We will do any thing to help you—to make you happy, dear!"

Hartley averted his face, and an uncontrollable twitch of the muscles betrayed gratitude or shame.

"You are a noble creature, Milly!—too noble—too grand, in your goodness, to be cursed by such a scamp of a brother!"

She interrupted him by a mute kiss upon his brow.

"I say you are!" asseverated Henry, striking his head with his clenched hand. "I could shoot myself when I think of robbing you."

This was not all counterfeit frenzy. If there were a trace of natural feeling left in the heart sin had defiled so foully, it was love for his only sister. With her words of self-denying affection still cooing in his ear—the pressure of her kiss yet upon his brow—he did feel himself, for one moment, to be the vilest of wretches in the scheme he was meditating.

"It is no robbery—but a free-will offering—an act of simple equity. Should not the children of the same parents share alike in worldly goods? I can live upon a third of the income which is now actually mine. Therefore, two-thirds should, according to my mode of calculation, be transferred to you."

"I cannot allow it! Yet there does appear to be some justice in a division of the estate—does there not?" returned Hartley, catching at the idea. "If our grandfather's mind had not been poisoned against me—if he had not carried this unreasonable enmity down with him to the mouth of the grave, I should not have been the pauper I am to-day. And mother thinks that he repented of his severity at the last—that he tried to express this when he uttered my name."

"It may have been so!" said Miriam, sadly. "But, Harry, don't speak bitterly of Grandpapa! All that he did was for the best, as he believed. He was the soul of honor and kindness. He was more than a father to me—to us both—while you lived at home."

"Until I offended him mortally—committed the unpardonable sin, in marrying the woman I loved!"

"He opposed it merely on account of your youth, Harry. He only begged that the marriage might be postponed a year."

"He taunted me afterward, with having allied myself to

a disgraced family! For the same reason he would never have consented to your marrying William Bent—not if his refusal had broken your heart."

"Which it certainly would not have done!" said Miriam, firmly. "Nor can I believe that he 'taunted' you then, or ever. I know that he expressed his regret at the discovery of the stain upon the character of Amelia's mother, and the ignominy attached to her children on this account, and this was not surprising. Why recall these painful passages in a past that is irrevocable? Why not recollect, instead, that Amelia expired in his fatherly arms, blessing him with her latest breath—that her child, and yours, became his from that hour, until his happy, sinless life was ended?—that believing you to be dead, he made that boy co-heir with myself—bestowed your portion upon him, to whom it would naturally have descended had you been in possession of it when you, as we supposed, died?—that he was poor Willie Bent's earnest friend and supporter in the cruel trial that sought to blacken his name—loved and esteemed him to the end, as is proved by his bequest to him?"

"The most ridiculous clause in a ridiculous will!" sneered Hartley, his black eyes emitting a fell light—"One sufficient in itself to damn the whole! He was ready and willing to believe me dead—the wish being father to the conviction—yet persisted in crediting the continued existence of a man who, when last heard from, was lying at the point of death—who, if he ever recovered, deserved his malediction for his ingratitude, instead of a blessing!"

"You forget that you are speaking of your oldest and best friend, Harry!" Miriam said, in the low, constrained tone belonging to her most passionate moods. "Wherever William Bent is—and that we shall hear from him again, I do believe—he is incapable of any baseness—least of all, of ingratitude to his benefactor. Either Grandpapa's remittance

miscarried, or he has written, and the letter never reached us, and he will not write again until he can liquidate the debt it must have stung his proud spirit to contract. Proud he was, and honorable, to a fault. Nothing but the extremity of want could have wrung that request from him, and the recollection of the obligation must hang, like a millstone, about his neck. Want of gratitude is the last sin that can be charged upon him. Was ever mortal more grateful than was he to you, for the preservation of his life? Did he not become to you, from that day, the most faithful of friends—your very slave? Did his attachment swerve at self-privation, at hardship, at unkindness, even? Grandpapa knew something of all this, and so did I, for I could not blind myself to what was passing before my eyes, in your home and his. He would have shared his last crust with you! he would have died for you, Harry! You feel in your heart that I have spoken the truth!"

Hartley leaped to his feet with a terrific imprecation.

"What are you talking about, girl! Has love for a dead man crazed you, or has that black-coated traitor of a Thorne been talking to you? If I thought that he knew—if I thought that this was his work, I would kill him to-morrow!—would crush him, as I would a wasp!"

He strode up and down the room, gesticulating and raving like a madman. Cousin Clarice had not falsified the Hartley blood in describing it as a hot, turbulent tide—and into the veins of this one of the race, vice, grown to riotous ripeness, had infused a yet blacker tincture. Miriam sat still—not cowering, but petrified by astonishment. His rage, and its ebullition in the disjointed exclamations that reached her ears, were enigmatical as startling—a labyrinth, at whose entrance she stood, transfixed by overwhelming perplexity.

"All this puling nonsense on your part has hurried on

what I meant to say before we separated to-night," said her brother, halting in front of her, speaking hard and fiercely. "I am much obliged to you for your offer of a third of an estate, when I may, and mean to have the whole. I have notified your guardian—your grandfather's executor, to-day, of my intention to dispute Dr. Stanton's will at the next term of the court, which comes on in April. I shall sue on behalf of my mother, who, if the will is set aside, will inherit, as is her right, the entire property, and dispose of it as she pleases."

"Harry! you will not do this iniquitous thing!" She, too, arose—pale as ashes—the pallor of holy horror—not fear. "I heard once before that you had threatened this impiety, but I thought it idle talk."

He laughed brutally. "Very 'iniquitous!' shocking 'impiety'—when Miss Miriam Hartley—Mrs. Thorne that hopes to be, unless Mr. Bent should appear to forbid the banns—will thereby be deprived of the pleasure of bestowing an unbroken fortune—at her mother's death, and, prior to that desirable event, her fair self—upon her reverend admirer, the immaculate priest, whose cunning left his own name out of the spurious will, sure, in the end, of handling every dollar he bestowed upon the two principal legatees! Oh! it was a beautiful game! They say he is the best chess-player in the state, but I have checkmated him this once!"

"How *dare* you insult me in this manner! You, a man—to use such language to your sister!"

Miriam's stature appeared to tower, as her spirit arose superior to his. Refined flame kindled her eye; the quivering nostril and curved lip betokened a temper as fearless, if more generous than her brother's.

"I repel your abominable insinuation concerning myself! I contradict as emphatically the charge you have lowered yourself to bring against an honorable gentleman, whose in-

tegrity cannot be impeached in this community, or in any other where he is known. I do not fear the result of the trial for him or for myself. But, Henry—for the sake of our mother, if you have no respect for the wishes of the dead—as you value her peace of mind—her very life—as you value your own reputation—think well before you take this step!"

"You may spare your adjurations and high tragedy airs! I have counted the cost, and am prepared to encounter the risk."

"You remember that there are other legatees, whose just claims you would nullify?"

"I know that unless I interfere a designing old maid will pocket a cool five thousand, and useless advertisements be inserted in the papers for tidings of one William Bent, who has been in the land of shades for three years and more—"

"We heard from him not two years since!" interrupted Miriam.

There was in Hartley's manner a singular mixture of uneasiness and impatience—if there could be such an emotion—a spiteful remorse—whenever the name of his early associate was introduced. His sister marked it now, in his fretful gesture at her correction.

"I am fully aware, I repeat, that thousands of dollars will be thrown away, which would be of signal convenience to me. As for the feelings of the sainted dead, he did not consult mine so often that I need be deterred by that consideration. In the community that exalts your lawyer-scribe of a parson into a demi-god, it is a matter of indifference to me what my reputation is. I can afford to wait a while for a character. 'Where the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together,' and where the filthy lucre is to be found, there will congregate the straitest sect of your religionists. Let me get the money! the popularity will follow."

"You speak as if the profit would be directly your own, were the will set aside. As I understand the case, your mother will inherit the estate—not yourself."

"A mother—who tells me every day, with tears in her eyes, how she is afflicted by the thought that, were she to die to-morrow, I would be an humble beneficiary of my rich sister—is not likely to withhold what she feels is my due."

"Does Mamma say *that?*" Miriam sank upon the sofa. "When she had my solemn pledge—a pledge I promised to write out, in form, the day I came of age—that, in any event, you should share equally with me whatever I possessed now or expected in the future! And she distrusts me! Father of mercies! have I not a friend upon earth!"

The arrow was too keen. She sobbed aloud. The look—the tone of agonized appeal, would have moved a heart of stone. Depraved, imbruted, intensely selfish as he was, Hartley was touched by it. He took a turn or two through the room, and approached her, in awkward consolation.

"Don't take it so to heart, Milly! You ought to have confidence enough in me to believe that I will act fairly and handsomely by you, should the old lady leave me every cent. It is natural that you should feel disappointed at the prospect of not being such a great heiress as Thorne meant you should be; but even should he leave you in the lurch, on this account—"

"Don't say that to me again!" The angry lightnings dried the tears. "You are not capable of appreciating anybody or any motive that is really upright and good. I have one proposition to make to you, if I have patience to get through with its statements. I have read your character to-night as I never did before. Its mainspring is self-interest—self-enrichment, at any cost of feeling, of principle, of appearances—every thing—so long as Henry Hartley is the gainer by the operation."

"You only do me justice!" retorted Hartley, bowing low, and smiling fiendishly. "Your discernment does you credit. Pray proceed!"

His irony steadied Miriam's nerves. "We will waste no time in idle talk, if you please. My aim is to avoid, if possible, the public scandal which this lawsuit will bring upon our family. Especially would I screen my grandfather's memory from insult. No man, while living, had more of the reverence of the society to which he was, for fifty years, an ornament and a benefactor. I will not, if I can help it, have that revered name dragged into court; his judgment, his natural affection, his sanity, assailed by coarse, unscrupulous hirelings—"

"No idle words, if you please! Question! Question!" mocked her brother.

"My offer is this; if you will relinquish your project of disputing the will, I engage to pass over to you, upon the day I reach twenty-one years of age, the property to which I am then entitled, reserving the merest pittance for myself, to keep me from actual want—and furthermore, to sign away all my right in the estate that would otherwise revert to me, should I outlive my mother—make a deed of gift of the same to you."

This lavish and imprudent liberality, springing from what was, in his estimation, so insufficient a cause, at first electrified the hearer; next, wrought incredulity as to the sound reason of its author; then doubts of her sincerity—doubts that thickened and grew into a belief that there was some hidden plot, by which he would yet be circumvented. Why not by her marriage, at a period anterior to her majority, with the ingenious fortune-hunter whose officiousness had produced this mischief, in which case she could execute no deed without his sanction? Self-abnegation, from any motive, was a stretch of human effort that baffled his under-

standing. He was totally incompetent to comprehend the heroic devotion to her grand-parent's memory; the sublime disinterestedness that breathed in her sacrifice.

He studied her expression as she awaited his reply—tranquil in its purity, serene in its elevation—and realizing, in some indefinite degree, that she occupied a different sphere from his, settled stolidly into the conviction that she hoped, by subtilty of no ordinary stamp, to outwit him, should he accede to her otherwise unaccountable proposition. In strategy, he would be no match for her acute and powerful intellect, even were she unaided, in her work of deception, by her cunning lover. He preferred to fight in the open field; to keep clear of all chances of ambuscade.

"Do you take me for a fool?" he said roughly, when this decision was reached. "Shall I allow the legacies to old Clarice and William Bent to slip through my fingers? Am I to be branded everywhere as a mean-spirited dog, who suffered his sister to impoverish herself by giving him her fortune? Owe all that I am worth to you; receive that as a gift, which is my right? Thank Heaven, I have too much pride and principle left for that!"

"I cannot understand your fine-drawn distinctions. As to impoverishing me, you do it more effectually if you gain your cause. In the one case, I reserve a meagre allowance for my support; in the other, I must work for my living, or eat the bread of charity."

"I fare moderately well upon that diet," returned her brother. "The only difference is, that a woman feeds me, while you would be maintained in comfort and elegance, by your nearest male relative—your natural protector."

"My natural protector!" She smiled—a dreary desolate gleam. "God help me!" She paused for some seconds, leaning her head upon her hand.

"I am to understand, then, that you positively reject my compromise?"

"I do—decidedly and finally!"

"Is my mother cognizant of your movements in this matter—may I inquire?"

"I cannot prevent your inquiries, but since she is, in some sort, my client, I must decline replying to that question. You will, at the proper time, receive a notification that regular proceedings are instituted, and so will our gentle Cousin Clarice. You can defend your interests or not, as you like. I suppose that she will do so on her part—the sweet saint! and that you will make common cause with her. It will not be the first family lawsuit upon record, so you need not regard our escutcheon as indelibly besmirched. Bless me! it is nearly one o'clock! *Bon soir, ma belle sœur*, and pleasant dreams!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CLOUD MUTTERS.

Limestone and its vicinage were in a ferment. Far and near, by high and low, nothing was talked of but the great Stanton Will Cause, which was to be tried at the April court. When the subject was first hinted abroad, the outcry against the contestant was unanimous, almost without an exception. Dr. Stanton's memory was fragrant among his old patients and neighbors, and the reputation of his scapegrace grandson proportionately odious. Several of Mrs. Hartley's oldest friends called upon her to entreat her to restrain her headstrong favorite from an act that must result in his ignominious defeat, and which was compromising her character as a respectful and affectionate daughter. She was evidently worried and depressed. She had loved peace and pursued it, throughout her life; the goodwill and favorable opinion of her acquaintances were desirable and precious in her sight, and she suffered acutely at the prospect of forfeiting these. But she was not deficient in that species of passive fortitude which has made of tender and shrinking women the most uncomplaining martyrs for affection's sake; and conscience was won over to love's side by the specious arguments with which her son incessantly plied her.

She had but one answer besides her tears, to give her friendly advisers. "Gentlemen, this suit is far more distressing to me than it can be to you. I would lay down my

life to avert the trial, if it would do any good; but there are things which are dearer to mothers than their own lives. I *must* see justice done my only son!"

After receiving some half-dozen of these expostulatory committees, she took to her bed, and was seriously indisposed for a week. Only in the seclusion of her chamber, could she close her ears to the clamor of gossip and speculation.

For speculations were rife, when the shock of announcement, and the deafening uproar of simultaneous exclamation were over. Shrewd and disinterested individuals began to calculate the *pros* and *cons* of the case. It was generally conceded that the ground of dispute would be the sanity of the testator, upon the day in which he dictated the body of the will, and—a stronger point—at the date of the codicil so offensive to Hartley. The whole community had become a school of law. Every man and woman—the very boys in the street, had well-substantiated opinions upon the matter, and prated as learnedly of testaments, deeds and codicils, legatees and heirs presumptive; of what constituted the validity of a legal document, and what flaw rendered it invalid; of *compos* and *non compos mentis*—as if a decoction of Coke, Blackstone and Chitty had been fed to them daily with their pap, and gradually increased in strength and quantity, until it formed now the staple of their diet. The reaction consequent upon the burst of universal reprobation was not long in showing itself; for a time in solemn head-shakes, wisely puckered mouths, arched eyebrows and meaning ejaculations, professedly expressive of non-committal. Then one and another ventured to hint boldly that there were unaccountable circumstances attendant upon the writing of the suspected instrument. It was odd that Dr. Stanton should have been so bent upon attending to the matter on that particular day, as not to be willing to wait

until he could engage a lawyer to "do up" the document in a decent and orderly manner; more odd that he should have asked Mr. Thorne to transcribe it, if he felt well—was of such "sound body and mind" as to be fit for such business. Why did he not write it himself? A rumor, of mysterious parentage, crept about to the effect that the deceased had a monomania, whose subject was will-making; no fewer than twenty—some said forty—of these important papers, bearing various dates, having been found among his effects, and that his solicitude to complete the latest of the batch was but an illustration of the old saying—"the ruling passion strong in death."

Hartley's gay, confident air went further than people were aware of, to establish a party which prophesied, if it did not desire his success. He took pains, for the first time in his life, to court popularity with the multitude. Handsome, vain and imperious as Absalom, he stole the hearts of many by flattering notice and gallant blandishments. He scattered money profusely among tradesmen; smiles and bows and pretty speeches as lavishly among their wives and daughters; and the Limestonians being only mortal, like the rest of mankind, accepted coin and compliments, with a charitable amelioration of judgment concerning him who strewed them. Nor was it only with the commonalty that he began to find grace. The chiefest of the town magnates presently declared openly in favor of the plaintiff's pretensions, and "if the Mayor didn't know what law was—who did?" was a query, propounded much more frequently than it was answered. This august official felt himself to be "authorized, after a careful—ah—examination of the merits of the matter to be—ah—adjudicated—to acknowledge the propriety and—ah—legality of Mr. Hartley's course. The esteemed testator had executed the—ah—anomalous instrument upon the eve of an attack which seri-

ously involved the—ah—well!—ah—cerebral region, and in his (Mayor Lewis's) judgment, was at that very time, laboring under—ah—serious—ah—mental aberration."

Pompous fool and corrupt official though he was, there were not wanting those, his superiors in sense and morality, who were influenced by his stultified pronunciamentos.

Surrounded by this turmoil and babble, the young pastor walked courageously through his routine of private and public duty; the mark for all eyes; the theme of all tongues; strong in conscious integrity and in faith that the Right would finally prevail; shaking from his mailed breast, with a calm disdain, as a giant might pigmy arrows, the shafts that idle or malicious meddlers aimed at his probity. Against the panoply of an approving conscience and genuine dignity of nature, such darts were but shivered straws. He carried one wound in his heart, nevertheless, wherever he went;—one lance-head rankled there, which he had not power to withdraw, nor did he possess the magical unguent whose application would render it painless. In the social circle, of which he was the popular centre; by the bedside of the sick; the bier of the departed; in the darkened house of mourning; even in the sanctuary, in the very act of prayer—when he besought comfort for the sorrowing; rest for the weary; light and guidance for the perplexed; succor for the oppressed; there arose before him the image of that lonely, persecuted girl, moving like a pale shadow, through the home of which she was once the joy and sunshine; her associates, a selfish, hypocritical cousin, whose alarm at the peril of her own interests deprived her of the ability to comfort her fellow-sufferer, had the will been there; a brother, who stabbed where he should have healed, and insulted her whom he should have protected, and a mother, estranged, made negligent of the duteous child, by a weak, blind partiality for the impenitent prodigal.

Thorne seldom met her now; more rarely was there the exchange of a word between them; but he kept diligent watch upon her movements, and Mrs. Fry furnished him with copious verbal memoranda of what his observation did not reach. From her, he learned how sweetly and patiently the wronged daughter nursed her mother through her sickness. He paid two pastoral calls to Mrs. Hartley, during the same week, without seeing Miriam. It was Cousin Clarice who fluttered about the couch of illness, with an injured, lamb-like demeanor, that would have been ludicrous, had it not annoyed him. The slightest of her officious services was rendered with an apparent determination to kiss the hand that dealt the cruel, unmerited blow—a superangelic resolution to continue the warmth of her forgiving breast to the viper that had stung her. The barbarous hand and ungrateful reptile, represented in the person of Mrs. Hartley, lay withered, annihilated—under the weight of coals heaped upon her head. A miserable, broken-spirited woman, she looked sorrowfully up in Thorne's face, as she held his hand at parting—a wistful pleading for his charity and compassion, that gained for her all and more than she asked. He doubted not that these voiceless appeals were continually made to Miriam, and with his knowledge of her nobleness of heart and temper, he was sure what answer they met. But bare regrets were unavailing; were the more positive proof of weakness, while the mother's purse was at the son's command, and the formidable preparations he was making for the trial were backed up by her name and endorsement.

"The subject is never mentioned in the family," said Mrs. Fry—"except in the private councils of Mrs. Hartley and young Hopeful. Cousin Clarice makes up for her enforced silence while there, by running down here nearly every day, bothering Hugh with questions and suggestions, and me with lugubrious complaints. As if I cared a pin

whether she ever got a farthing of her legacy! If any thing could, in my mind, cast a doubt upon poor, dear Dr. Stanton's sanity, it would be his bequest to this finical, sickening humbug. I told her pretty plainly, yesterday, that I was so engrossed by my sympathy for Miriam, that I did not realize her superior claims upon my pity; whereupon she entered upon the crookedest of her zigzag harangues, to show me how much more distressing than her cousin's, would be her deplorable plight, should the will be broken.

"'Miriam has her mother, who will never see her suffer, and her brother, who, if only for shame, dare not neglect to make a suitable provision for her, but *I* am all alone, Fanny!' A tremendous sob. 'It is not the loss of the pecuniary testimonial'—that was her mild way of drawing it—'not so much the loss of the pecuniary testimonial bequeathed to me by my sainted father, that I dread. I prize it, because it is his gift; a seal to the world, of my adoption into his family, my place in his heart; his recognition of me as the widow of his son.' Sob No. 2. 'You know, Fanny, how long I have been virtually, as I should have been in name—but for the adverse decree of Providence, a member of the Stanton household—and although it may seem unbecoming in me to say it—not the least respected or beloved of the happy, united band. This disruption, this menaced repudiation of my claims, has nearly bereft me of reason. So Mr. Fry has not heard from F—— yet, and cannot say whether or not Mr. Kay will defend us?'

"I declare I am ready to run out of the back-door, when I hear her clear her throat—that thin, shrill, useless, little 'hem!' of hers—upon the front porch! Miriam comes often, too. I can see that the dear child's heart is enduring the tortures of lingering death, in the dearth of love and appreciation, to which she has been so suddenly consigned. But hers is unmurmuring sorrow. It is only by her gasp of

pain, her change of color and involuntary start, at some of Fanny's winning ways, that I can guess when she thinks of and longs for Willie. When she forces herself to talk to Hugh of business pertaining to this unhappy suit; makes inquiries and seeks advice, with such a lost, pitiful air, I am reminded that she has no protector, no safe adviser at home, since her 'strong staff' was broken. But what gives me the worst heartache of all, is when she says least—only creeps close to me, like a tired, hunted deer, her eyes heavy and mournful; leans her head against my shoulder or knee, and rests there a long while, without a word or a tear. She came in last night, after supper. Parker escorted her from home. How that fellow worships her! He watches her as if she were a sick baby. Hugh was out, and as she owned to being 'a little tired,' I made her lie down upon the lounge there, and rubbed her hands and head; she used to do the same for me, when she was the stronger of the two—until she fell asleep.

"Do you know that I sat by her on that cushion, and looked at the poor, pale face, with the sad, weary lines about the mouth and brow, and compared it with the bright, spirited countenance of one year ago, until I felt the great warm drops roll down my cheeks, in a shower upon my hands? She does not repine; if hope has deserted her, faith and patience have not."

Here the voluble dame's narrative was interrupted by some housewifely call, and she left her visitor to entertain himself for a while. When her footsteps died away in the hall, he sat down upon the hallowed lounge, and laid his head where hers had rested.

The next day, Miriam received through Parker's hand, the first note Thorne had ever written her. Besides the simple direction, "Miss Hartley," upon the envelope, there was no address, nor was there any signature. It contained

but these words: "Wherefore, let them that suffer, according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls unto Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator. Cast all your care upon Him, *for He careth for you!*"

Parker's errand to town had been to purchase a pair of pruning scissors, and, armed with these and a rake, he waited for his young mistress at the back-door, within half an hour after his return. She did not keep him long. From her arm hung the small basket she usually carried upon her visits to the burying-ground, and thither their present errand led them. It was now the middle of March, and within the small enclosure, as abroad, the warm, early Spring had scattered many tokens of her presence. The ivy covering the old stone wall, showed, amid the glossy, dark-green foliage, tufts of tender and livelier verdure; the tall sentinel cedars looked fresh and vigorous; the perpetual roses that grew luxuriantly at the head and foot of nearly every mound, threw out thrifty shoots, purplish and light-green, and over each hillock was spread a coverlet of emerald velvet—palest and softest upon the smallest there.

To this Miriam went first. Dry twigs and leaves had been lodged against it by the wind, since she was last there, and she allowed no hands save her own to tend that spot. Kneeling beside it, she removed the faded bouquet from above her boy's heart, and arranged in its place the spring blossoms she had brought in her basket. Ever, with this sweetly-sad office, there mingled a vision of other hands, slender, quick, noiseless, whose handling of flowers was gentle to tenderness. As hers divided or grouped the frail stems, she unconsciously imitated his manner of doing this. With white hyacinths, snow-drops and violets, he was peculiarly associated—she could not say whether it was by their fragility and delicate perfume, or by the

memories of other Springs, when he explored, with her, the garden borders the snow had lately left bare, in quest of these. She recalled his eager face—that expression of concentrated earnestness she had never seen upon another child's visage, bending over the beds, as his deft fingers parted the leaves that might conceal the shy flowerets; his flashing smile, as the prize was found; his ringing shout of joy—

Dead! dead! dust and ashes!

"Miss Mir'um," said Parker, in respectful hesitancy.

She got up, sick and trembling.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am!" The negro averted his eyes from her woe-stricken features. "But I should like to have some d'rection about trimmin' this here rose-bush. It's a terrible rapid climber, and unless you mean to have a frame built for it, I'll have to cut half of it away."

It grew beside the tomb of Mrs. Henry Hartley, enclasping it with its long, lithe arms. Miriam forced herself to give orders, and to aid in pruning and training it. She was holding some of the branches in position, to be lashed to the supporting stake, and Parker cutting cord into lengths, for tying them, when the distant trampling of hoofs made both look toward the public road. The graveyard was a retired place, but not so far from the highway that they could not recognize a couple of equestrians, galloping toward the country. If they had not known the streaming white plumes of the jaunty jockey-cap and the blue riding-habit of one; the fine figure and dashing horsemanship of the other—the united peal of laughter that sounded across the fields, in the still afternoon, would have proclaimed their identity.

"And she has got Frisk again!" uttered Parker, involuntarily.

Miriam compressed her lips, without speaking.

"I hope you wont consider me too free, Miss Mir'um," pursued the privileged servitor; "but if you'd only speak to Mars' Henry about Miss Letty's strainin' that horse so constant and violent, 'twould be a good thing. Frisk is young, and if he *is* the best blood in Kentucky, he can't stand sech doings. 'Taint in any horse that ever I see, to b'ar it."

"I know it. I have spoken twice to my brother about it, but he does not think there is any danger. Frisk was trained to fast going."

"Yes, ma'am—but you always rid like a lady, no matter how rapid you went, nor how many fences and ditches you cleared, and you had mercy 'pon your horse. 'Twarnt like racin' for two hours and better, on a stretch, up and down hill. There aint a night that he's brought home, after she's been a-usin' of him, that he aint half-foundered."

There was no reply. The rose-tree was tied up, the dead and superfluous limbs lopped off, and Parker, producing a brush from his basket, set to work rubbing off the dust and fungus that had accumulated upon the face of the stone.

"Poor Miss 'Melia!" he said, by and by. "I 'spose 'twont be very long now before her place will be filled."

"What do you mean?" asked Miriam, arresting her occupation of clipping the dead grass from her sister-in-law's grave.

"Why, they say down at Mr. Mayor_Lewis's, that Miss Letty is going to marry Mars' Henry, soon as—"

"As what? Go on!"

"As the trial is over, and he gets hold of the property. Fidely—Mrs. Lewis's maid—was to see Rhody last night, and she says they're engaged, sure and sartain, and that Mrs. Lewis is dreadful distressed about it. I aint in the habit of listenin' to servants' stories, you know, Miss Mir'um, but I b'lieve this one. Mrs. Lewis tells every thing to

Fidely, and Fidely is one of Mr. Thorne's church-members, and aint capacitated to tell an untruth."

Miriam was as little "in the habit of listening to servants' stories," as was the respectable colored individual, who expressed such lofty contempt for this servile species of oral communication; still she could not put aside this tale with the indifference which it perhaps deserved. The outrageous flirtation between her brother and Letty Lewis was the talk of the town, and, of course, no secret to Hartley's family; but none of them had, for an instant, dreamed of attaching any importance to it. Miss Lewis had always some affair of the kind on hand, and if she seemed to go rather further with this than with the majority of her "cases," it was readily accounted for by the extreme willingness of the other party to proceed to all lengths, in whatever suited his humor or taste. Miriam considered the intimacy discreditable to both, but Letty's notions were never hers upon these subjects, and she had no doubt but that this desperate friendship, or pretence of love-making, would soon run its course to satiety, or terminate in a decisive blow-up. *Would* Harry marry her? *Could* she marry him? Giddy and shallow-hearted Letty was, to a degree unsurpassed by any other girl in her circle, and that was saying a good deal; but it was incredible that she should be so mad as to bind herself for life to a man so notoriously dissipated as Henry Hartley. Then came the thought of what Parker reluctantly intimated, the prospect—doubtless, in Letty's eyes the probability—of her lover's becoming the heir to a noble fortune; the hope that she would queen it in the finest old mansion in the county.

Oh! he would not dare to introduce this woman, as the usurper of his mother's place—the successor of the placid, dignified mistress, who had guided the clock-work of the orderly establishment, ever since his birth!

"I will not believe it!" she said emphatically, "Fidelia is mistaken, or you are. You had better say no more about this absurd report to any one."

"Just as you wish, ma'am. I am sartain you can't wish to disbelieve it mor'n I do. Though, to be sure, it wouldn't make the difference to me it would to some of the people. Thank the Lord, I belong to you, Miss Mir'um, and nobody has never dared to lay a finger upon *your* pa's will. What he had to leave was divisioned accordin' to rule, and if your share warnt much besides Rhody and me and the two child'en, there's work in us yet, Miss Mir'um! Never you fear lest you should come to want, if all the wills in Christendom was upsot!"

"I know you are faithful, Uncle Parker. I do not fear poverty for myself or privations for you. But my hope is not in man, or in the decisions of any earthly court."

She sent him home when their work was done, and herself went back to Willie's grave. Sitting upon the turf beside it, she laid her arm upon it—an instinctive and unconscious caress. Over the low wall she saw the verdant hills, the orchards, in the flush and glory of their vernal bloom; the ashy green of the budding forests; overhead, pearly clouds, tinted, as they left the zenith, with pink, rose-color, crimson—one sea incarnadine, at the horizon.

"AND IN THE WORLD TO COME, ETERNAL LIFE!" This was the bow of promise, thrown suddenly across her cloud-wrapped spirit. It is not for us to say how such messages of blissful consolation are brought to us in the hour of greatest need. They are sent by the Comforter; this is revealed —and to Him our grateful souls bow in adoring thankfulness. We may not assert our knowledge as to who are His commissioned messengers. That he employs bearers we are assured; of their nature we are not left in ignorance; and moreover we know—we *feel* in every loving, throbbing

fibre of our hearts, *who* would most joyfully bring balm for our pain, light to our darkness, hope in our despair. Miriam almost believed that she heard the remembered voice of her darling—the unchildlike intonations, whose tender soothing had often made her smile, by their thrilling emphasis. She smiled now, but with full eyes and heart; her lifted gaze seemed to pierce the visible heavens, as she repeated the words of holy cheer.

"In the world to come, Eternal Life!"

Was not this worth waiting for? Were blighted affections; bereavements, that left empty the heart they reft; were patient endurance in well-doing, under treachery and robbery; a lonely youth, a desolate old age; a great fight of afflictions—were these too dear a price to pay for this inheritance, sure and final? She drank in strength from the pledge, as from a fountain. It was a draught from the river of Life, brought to her parched tongue by angel hands—for the Father knew she had need of this refreshment.

A footstep, muffled by the grass-grown walk, until the intruder was close at hand, called her back to earth. She caught up her hat and basket, and arose to retire. Neale Thorne met her full in the gateway. He appeared as surprised as herself at the encounter.

"Pardon my intrusion! I did not expect to find you here! Do not let me drive you away!"

"I was just going home. Your coming is no interruption. Have you been to the house?"

"No. I had in one sense, an errand here, and, since I have met you, will you allow me to explain it?"

He held a roll of paper, which he opened. Several months before, Mrs. Hartley had requested him to write to an acquaintance of his, a sculptor in New York, for plans of tombstones to be erected above Dr. Stanton's and Willie's resting-places. The man had replied, promising to furnish them

in the Spring, since they could not be used until that season. Thorne had received them but a few hours before, and, prior to sending them to the family, had extended his evening walk to the cemetery, where, with the designs in his hand, he could best imagine what would be the effect of each one.

"We will not shrink from looking at these!" he said, spreading them upon the top of the wall—"remembering that the marble will be but a perishable record, compared with the page where their names are written among the living, not the dead. The inscriptions are for you to compose," he added, when the various drawings had been inspected, and Miriam had made her choice, subject, of course, to her mother's wishes.

"If it were left to me, I would write the same words above both," she answered, softly.

"'And in the world to come, Eternal Life!'"

"Our promised inheritance—*their* possession—present and abiding!" replied Neale.

They leaned upon the wall, and looked toward the sunsetting, now reddening the white monuments, and tipping with gold the crowns of the funereal cedars.

"Yet a little time—*only* a little while!" Neale ended the silence, bending a bright face upon his companion—a smile, beautiful in its deathless love and cheerful hope. "We will wait!"

He gave her the papers—pressed her hand between both of his, and was gone.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PITCH STICKS.

"My Dear Pastor:—If it is not asking too much, would it trouble you to call to see me, at eleven o'clock this morning? I am in *great trouble*, and a visit from you would be a great comfort. I take the liberty of setting the time, because I shall be alone at eleven o'clock.

"Your afflicted friend,

"Martha Lewis."

So entreated a badly-written, worse-spelled note, which was brought to Mr. Thorne's study one morning. The worthy Mayoress was illiterate and incorrigibly old-fashioned, yet the most sensible of her neighbors liked and respected her more than they did all the rest of the family, put together. Her pastor shared fully in this feeling. He knew her kind heart, her sterling principle, her humble piety, and appreciating the value of these, could not but esteem her. Supposing, from the purport of her communication, that she had received tidings of the death of some friend or relative, he made his arrangements to call at the appointed hour.

In passing down the street, he was more displeased than surprised to meet Letty and David Lewis. The former was dressed elegantly, and attended by Henry Hartley; the brother playing the gallant to a Miss Bullard, a damsel of Miss Letitia's stamp. The four were in great glee, laughing and chattering at such a rate, that sober passengers turned to stare after them, when they had swept by. Letty

was not the girl to give up a frolic because her mother's sister or uncle had died. Mrs. Lewis's griefs and pleasures were generally all her own; her children going their way and not interfering with hers, except when it incommoded them.

She was alone, according to the terms of the engagement, and while she appeared care-worn and nervous, some time was consumed in the discussion of indifferent subjects without allusion to her affliction.

Mr. Thorne introduced the topic. "I was sorry to learn from your note, Mrs. Lewis, that some heavy sorrow had befallen you. Have you lost a friend?"

Mrs. Lewis burst into tears. "No, sir, but I'm likely to lose my daughter!"

"Ah! is Jane ill? I did not know that you had sickness in the family."

"Sickness of the worst kind, sir! the sickness that has brought down the pride of many a family, and broken many a silly girl's heart, in the end—yes! and her parents, too! Letty wants to get married, Mr. Thorne!"

Neale was young in the ministry; but he had already been the recipient of too many queer confidences—queer in their nature, and still more so in their telling, to be betrayed into a smile at this unexpected climax. Yet it required an effort to maintain the proper shade of sympathizing gravity, in replying.

"The desire is natural enough in itself, I suppose, madam. It is certainly not an uncommon one. Still, it cannot be denied that much of the evil in this life springs from misplaced confidence—from imprudent attachments."

"That's so, sir! but I could bear it better if I thought she really loved the man. It is nothing but a foolish, run-mad notion of hers, I'm convinced. To engage herself to a person she didn't care a button for three months ago, and such a wild, dissipated, wicked fellow as Harry Hartley!"

"Can it be possible!"

"Why, didn't you know it? They've done nothing but gallivant abroad, and show themselves in company with one another from the day he came home—a sad day it was to me, and his mother, too, for that matter! I thought the whole town was ringing with it."

In respect for the mother's feelings, Thorne forbore to remind her of the dozen love-scrapes per annum with which Letty had amused her neighbors ever since she "turned out."

"I observed that they were together a great deal, but did not suspect that there was any thing serious going on. I hope still that it is only a passing fancy."

"*He* wont let it pass, sir! Nothing will suit him but to be married right straight off, and she's just as crazy for it. She drives me out of my head, talking about her wedding-clothes and wedding-party. Only this morning she asked her father, right before my face, Mr. Thorne, whether—seeing you and Mr. Hartley was not on good terms—it wouldn't be the handsome thing to write for Dr. Bogus to perform the ceremony. So I spoke up—'taint often I cross my husband or children, Mr. Thorne, but, says I—'Letitia Lewis! never shall you throw yourself away upon that bad, trifling young man, while I can prevent it!'

"'I'm of age, Ma!' says she.

"'If you are,' says I, 'you shan't marry Harry Hartley from my house—no! not if you was as old as Methusaleh!'

"With that she breaks out into a laugh. 'I don't imagine Harry would want me very badly in that case!' says she, and goes out singing. I do believe it will kill me, Mr. Thorne! I have but the two daughters, and Jane is too young to be much of a companion for me. Letitia was my first girl, and I've brought her up with so much pride in her beauty, and cunning ways, and high spirits. To think of

her being a drunkard's wife! Ah! nobody knows better what that misery is than my poor mother's children! I can't forget what she suffered!"

Her sobs interfered and impeded the articulation they had threatened throughout this complaint.

"Since the thought afflicts you so much, why do you not induce Mr. Lewis to interpose his authority? It is harder for a daughter to overleap a father's prohibition than a mother's—in these affairs, at least."

"He wont do it, sir! I've went down on my knees to beg him to save her. I know what Harry Hartley was to his first wife, Mr. Thorne. Miss Bent and me was neighbors then. I was with her in her last sickness, and she told me how he had neglected poor Amelia, and she distracted with love for him all the time—the impudent, handsome scamp! and how he tried to beguile Willie Bent into all manner of mischievous practices, and used him as a cloak for his wickedness, and Willie believing in him pretty near as firmly as his wife did! He made Amelia ask her aunt for money for herself, and then give it to him, while he was drinking and gambling away the property his father left him, besides what his grandfather gave him when he was married. He was like a horse-leech to them poor Bents—the brother and the sister. And he's no better now, sir! There's no denying that, as I told Mr. Lewis last night. Do we want any plainer proof of what he is, than his having such a friend as that gambler, down there at the Swan hotel?

"So, says Mr. Lewis, says he—'What can I do, Marthy? It might be a great deal worse. The young man is of a firstrate family, and is likely to get a fortune before long, and maybe Letty will steady him.'

"'Never!' says I. 'There aint the woman living—no! nor the angel, that could steady that fellow. He's gone too far wrong. Aint he doing his best, this minute, to belie and

belittle his blessed grandfather, whose shoes he wasn't worthy to unloose; to deceive his mother and cheat his only sister? And Letty aint the kind to reform her husband. She's too light and gay. If Miriam Hartley, with twenty times as much sense and heart as my girl, can't manage her brother and break him of his vile courses, his wife never will. So, says I—'Tell him you'll cut her off with a shilling the day she marries him, and I'll be bound the day wont be set in a hurry!'"

Thorne did smile now at this shrewd hit at the disinterested affection of the son-in-law elect.

"You have my sincere sympathy, Mrs. Lewis. Your scruples are only reasonable, and I cannot help thinking that Mr. Lewis will yet perceive their weight, and this trial be averted. I have the more hope that he will be able to influence his daughter, if what you state be true—namely, that her fancy for this gentleman is a girlish caprice. It is hardly my place to advise you upon such a subject, yet allow me to remind you that these caprices are often deepened into resolutions by an imprudent show of opposition. I have heard of many, and known some engagements, that were dissolved by the parties themselves, with no action from disapproving parents, beyond a request that the marriage should be delayed for a certain or indefinite time, and then a wise neglect of the whole matter. A brisk breath blows a coal into a blaze; still, damp air quenches it."

"But they wont listen to me when I oppose their marrying directly!"

"Propose, instead, that the wedding shall take place at the end of six or eight months, if both are of the same mind then as now. If the flame is fed by brushwood, it will expire in half that time. If it is genuine love, there will be no use in trying to extinguish it."

"Genuine love, Mr. Thorne! Do you think that a man

who has run the round of dissipation that Harry Hartley has, can have enough heart left to feel real love for anybody? No! he means to marry my Letty because she is pretty and lively, and her father is rich, and will settle something handsome upon her. And this brings me to another thing that worries me. This young man has Mr. Lewis under his thumb, for some reason or other. I came into the room unexpected, last night, when they were alone together. Neither of them saw me—they were so busy with a lot of papers upon the table between them. And just as I stood in the door, I saw Hartley clap Mr. Lewis on the back—as saucy and familiar as could be—and says he—'Come, now, Father Lewis, don't be getting stingy in your old age! She is your oldest daughter, remember, and I have done some ticklish jobs for you, in my time.' I didn't stay to hear any more. Now, I ask you, Mr. Thorne—ought I, as a mother, and a Christian woman, to hand my girl over to a villain like that?"

"By no means, madam! You should do all in your power to prevent it, if these are your views and feelings. The question is, what is the safest means of gaining your point? I have nothing to say respecting Mr. Hartley—"

"He has a plenty to say about *you!*" interrupted Mrs. Lewis, warmly.

"That may be! He has a right to his opinion, and I shall not attempt to stifle its expression. But I was about to remark that your acquaintance with his life and character is of longer standing than mine. If your judgment of these is unfavorable, it is your duty to let your daughter know it, and Mr. Hartley, also, if she will not listen to you. Only, my counsel is, as I have said, a judicious moderation, that may prevail upon them to act reasonably; while, on the other hand, excitement of language and manner will render them more obstinate. Should the worst then come, you will be

sustained by the consciousness that it was not hurried on by your harshness. In this, as in thousands of other instances, that occur in our daily experience, God gives us just light enough to show us the next step, and bids us trust Him for the end. This is what is meant by 'committing our ways' unto Him, and if he does not 'bring our desires to pass' in the way we could have wished, it is nevertheless the best way for us, at last."

"Ah! if my faithless heart could feel that!" sighed the mother.

"Even if it cannot just now, you can still know, with your head, that it is true, for He has said it," was Thorne's parting remark.

Back in his study once more, he confessed his own need of the injunctions he had addressed to the doubting disciple. Letty Lewis was to be Miriam's sister! Should the law, which is justly distinguished from equity, adjudge the disputed estate to Mrs. Hartley, he could not shut his eyes to the almost certain event of its transfer, sooner or later, to the petted son. Whatever provision was made for Miriam, the Hartley household must cease to be a congenial abode for her. She was too proud to remain therein, either as the guest or dependent of the vain, frivolous creature who was chosen to reign in her stead, in the halls of her fathers. Where would she seek a home?

He wandered to the window, and surveyed the pretty Gothic cottage across the way.

"If there were any hope—"

He did not consider it a coincidence worth remembering, that, while he stood there, Letty Lewis and her lover passed along the sidewalk bordered by the iron railing of the church lot. It was a rare occurrence when he did not catch a glimpse of them upon the street, on fine days. They did not look toward the study, although, the church being on

the corner, their route led them directly under his window. For a wonder, Letty had her veil down, and was not talking. She walked with her head up, and tossed it rather higher than was her custom, while her escort's face wore the dark red flush of anger.

"A quarrel, I hope," said Thorne, unfeelingly. "If true love never runs smooth, the course of such an unworthy passion as that ought to be filled with rocks and snags."

It is our business to inquire into the origin of the change in the behavior of the betrothed pair, which he dismissed so contemptuously. The party of four, which he had encountered on his way to Mr. Lewis's, was bound upon a sight-seeing excursion—a wax-work exhibition in one of the public halls. In the same block with this building was the hotel, honored by being the sojourning place of Jack Wilson, and that elegant gentleman was sunning himself upon the steps, hands in his pockets and cigar in mouth, as the gay quartette went by. Hartley and Lewis bestowed each a careless nod upon him; the ladies did not vouchsafe a look.

"Fine girls!" observed a brother practitioner of the mysterious art by which Wilson earned his livelihood. He was making a professional tour of the state, and finding his old friend Wilson in Limestone, had concluded to stop over a day at the hotel.

"Fine girls!" he repeated, with an expletive of admiration, we may as well omit. "Who are they, Jack?"

Wilson furnished their names, adding, with a wink, "The foremost one is the Mayor's daughter I was talking about this morning, and that is Hartley himself with her."

"You don't say so!" elongating his neck to stare after them. "I wish I had known it in season to get a good look at him. I have a curiosity to see the fellow. But I say, Jack—seems to me he behaves mighty cavalierly to you, considering you've been dry-nurse to him so long. Upon

my word, I don't think he could have given his negro footman a cooler 'how-d'ye-do?' than he did you. You ought to teach him better manners, in public. He owes you too much for you to take the place of 'sub' in the concern."

Wilson flinched at the cut, but tried to carry the matter out boldly.

"Pooh, Buckley! that's all a notion of yours! Hartley knows his obligations to me too well to play the 'boss.' He has acted very gentlemanly with me since I've been here; introduced me into the best circles in town, and all that sort of thing. You know if I have a weakness, it is for the aristocracy."

"That don't tally with what I heard in the bar-room last night! 'Twas the first I knew of your being in town. Two fellows were taking a julep at the counter, and one of them asked the other if you were still here. 'Oh yes!' said he, 'and stay here he will, till Hartley pays him, and orders him off.' 'Will he go then?' asked the first. 'Harry swears he shall!' said the other. 'He vows that he means to run for magistrate next year, and he thinks Wilson wouldn't bring him many votes.' 'It may not be so easy to move him,' said No. 1. 'As Lee says—pitch sticks!' 'Yes,' said No. 2, 'but you know Hartley's answer—'Then I must use another kind of stick to get rid of him.' He says he has flogged this fellow—this spaniel bull-dog, he calls him—twice down to his proper level, and that the third time never fails.'"

Wilson's face was the color of a boiled lobster.

"It's a lie from beginning to end!" he spluttered. "Hartley never dared use such language about me! If I thought he had—"

"Well! what could you do? He is a born gentleman, one of your aristocracy, and is going to be a rich magistrate. Better notice which side your bread is buttered. Let him

talk, so long as he shells out to you to the right tune. Men in our line will never thrive, if they are too nice to take a kick now and then. Only—I wouldn't let the stuck-up rascal cut me publicly, as he did just now. It would do *him* good to take him down a peg or two. If he gets too uppish, he may dispute your little account when it is presented."

"Not he! I have him just so!" closing his thumb upon his forefinger.

"Don't look much like it now!" commented Buckley, sarcastically.

"It doesn't, hey? I bet you ten dollars to five, that I can follow him into that exhibition room, which is filling up pretty fast with the most fashionable people of Limestone; introduce you to him and make him present you to his friends. Then, I'll cut him out as beau to his girl, and walk clear around the room with her, in the sight of all the 'nobs.'"

"Done!"

They threw away the stumps of their cigars; stepped back into the bar for a fortifying glass, and sallied out.

Letitia was shrieking with laughter at a comic group in the centre of the room; the regards of the entire company drawn to her party by her merriment. Hartley was bending to her ear, with some remark upon the figures under observation, which he did not care to utter aloud, when his elbow was twitched importunately.

"My particular friend, Mr. Buckley, late from Mobile!" announced Jack, so significantly, that the "particular friend," joining it to the fact that he had not visited Mobile in a year, set it down forthwith, among his mental memoranda, that there was something in the history of young Hartley's residence in that city, that would not bear the air; which was one thong in the whip of scorpions brandished over his head, by his comrade in adventure.

"He is a stranger in your hospitable town," pursued Wilson, having seen the necessary handshaking performed—reluctantly by Hartley, jollily by Buckley. "Will you oblige me by introducing him to your friends?"

Hartley started at the command—the meaning eye made it nothing less imperative—bit his lip until the blood sprang to the surface, then, concluding that the best way to get out of the dilemma was to hurry the matter through, said, hastily—"Miss Lewis, Miss Bullard, Mr. Lewis—Mr. Buckley!" and touched Letty's arm, to make her move away.

Mr. Buckley had long sandy soap-locks, mustache and goatee, and wore a pair of green pantaloons, whose plaid was positively "stunning;" a dust-colored sack, very brief in the skirts and cut away in front; a blue velvet vest, a red neck-tie, a brassy watch-chain, with an immense bundle of "charms" depending therefrom, and a round-crowned drab felt hat. A girl of sense and dignity would, while recognizing his rank at a glance, have returned his bow in silence, and passed on, in compliance with the hint she had received. Letty had little sense, and less dignity; therefore, she stood her ground, stretched her blue eyes at the obnoxious rowdy without acknowledging his salutation; exchanged looks with Miss Bullard, who giggled behind her fan; then Letty "cocked" her pert little nose, and cut the new-comer dead.

"No go!" muttered this personage to Wilson. "What did I tell you?"

"And what did I tell *you*?" Putting on a smile of effrontery, Jack sidled around to Letty's right hand.

"I hope I have the pleasure of seeing you well, Miss Lewis? But the question is superfluous. Your roses are in advance of all the rest, this year."

Miss Bullard giggled again, at Letty's back, and, before she could frame a reply, she saw expressive looks directed toward herself and company, by others in the hall. Some slyly

touched their neighbors; others whispered and smiled scornfully.

"I am very well," she said snappishly.

Wilson's smirk was as broad as if she had said the most delightful thing imaginable.

"May I ask you to accept my arm around the room, to inspect these miracles of art?" was his audacious step further, as he presented his elbow with the grace of a dancing-jack.

"I am here with Mr. Hartley!" Letty crimsoned to the roots of her fair curls. Her eye said plainly as indignant ray could speak, to her lover: "Protect me from this fellow!"

"Oh! that is nothing! My friend Harry will excuse you, for a little while, since you run off with *me!*" In a lower tone, he subjoined; "He will have you all to himself so soon, that he can afford to be merciful to us poor unfortunate bachelors, who are obliged to look on and sigh at a distance, for the forbidden fruit!"

His liquor-scented breath burned her cheek, he approached his mouth so near to her ear. She saw her brother frown; Miss Bullard's grimace of loathing and amusement, and, for the first time in her life, she resented a complimentary speech.

"Mr. Hartley!" wheeling impetuously upon him—"This man has insulted me!"

"For Heaven's sake!"—Hartley grasped her arm and hissed the words—"don't make a scene here! I will settle it by and by!"

Unheeding his whitening cheek and wrathful eyes, she struck off his hold.

"Did you understand me, sir?" This time others besides the one addressed, heard her. "This person has insulted me grossly! If you cannot defend me, my brother will!"

Before the redoubtable David could respond to this sisterly appeal, Wilson's burly body was doubled up by a heavy blow, aimed according to General Jackson's famous receipt, and he rolled over upon the floor, with a shock that made the waxen groups tremble from pedestal to crown.

"Pick up your friend!" said Hartley to Buckley, who grinned in infinite enjoyment of the pugilistic display; and he withdrew Letty from the laughing assembly, David following with Miss Bullard.

The latter young lady soon turned off to go to her own home, attended by Lewis, and the lovers walked the rest of the way by themselves. Letty had pulled down her black lace veil, the instant her betrothed avenged her wrongs, and after parting with her brother and his companion, she deemed it advisable to sniff audibly, twice or thrice, and to extract a flimsy cobweb of lace and cambric from her pocket, to wipe the place where the tears were supposed to be—still behind the veil. Her cavalier preserved a dogged taciturnity under these manœuvres, and the furtive glance she stole at him, revealed a physiognomy more like that of a truculent bear than a victorious knight awaiting the meed of valorous deed in defence of his lady-love. She grew angry. If he would not speak, she was above making advances. Other beaux had knocked down men for her sake, without making a serious matter of it. Indeed, she had found the éclat of such exhibitions decidedly pleasant. Harry ought to be grateful that she had accorded to him the privilege of protecting her when her brother was standing by, since it was tantamount to a confession of their mutual relations. But men were thankless creatures, who never valued women's favors as they should do!

Both maintained their sulky dignity, until they reached the Mayor's showy mansion.

"Walk in!" said Letty, ungraciously, pausing in the porch.

"No—thank you! Good morning!"

"How charmingly savage he looks!" thought Letty, and her silly little heart experienced a throb of awe that was new and interesting; a touch of respect, which gave strength and flavor to the feeling she mistook for love. Like a flash, the reflection and sensation ran through her mind, and ere Hartley gained the gate, he heard his name called tremulously—coaxingly. She ran down the steps to meet him. Her veil was up, and her eyes suffused with starting tears.

"You are not angry with me—are you, Harry, dear?"

"No, Letty! but you were imprudent, and may have done me more mischief than you can imagine."

Letty began to cry. He looked too grand and gloomy for her to think of resenting his reproof. She had no idea that she had done any harm; but she had often told him that a harsh word from him would break her heart, and she must prove her prophecy. Hartley appeared to relent. They were screened by the shrubbery, and he took her hand; called her his "own angel," and led her into the house to the room allotted to their tête-à-têtes. He did not emerge from this for an hour, and when he did, his countenance was sunny as the day. He looked back from the gate, to smile and raise his hat toward the blinds, held so cautiously ajar by five white finger-tips.

"An anchor to windward—come what may!" he soliloquized, snapping his fingers in his rapid walk.

"Really, these lovers' quarrels are delicious!" said Letty, regarding her flushed cheeks and twinkling dimples, in the mirror—"and decidedly becoming!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LOST FOUND.

"Busy?" interrogated Mr. Lee, at whose knock Thorne unclosed his study door, shortly after his return from Mr. Lewis's.

"I am seldom too busy to give you what time you want," was the rejoinder. "To-day I am not pressed by work. Take a seat!"

It was an inexplicable friendship that existed between these two, said the world. Until Thorne's assumption of the pastorate of the Grand Street Church, Lee had not attended Divine service twice in four years. He was not an infidel, his moral standing was fair; he but represented a certain class in every community, particularly in the South and the South-West, whose indifference to the outward observances of religion, as well as its inner workings, is unaffected and unblushingly manifested. But for months past, his office, formerly the Sabbath rendezvous of the wild and thoughtless youths of the town—a general reception-room of the best-bred (so-called) wits and smokers in the place—had been decently locked and utterly deserted from Saturday night until Monday morning, and it was an exception, remarked upon for its singularity, when Mr. Lee's seat in church was vacant. He was not a demonstrative man, although an independent; but his likings were as strong as his prejudices. He had taken a fancy to Thorne, upon their first hunting-party, for the reasons already stated by

Mrs. Fry to Neale—a fancy that grew into affectionate interest with the progress of their intercourse. Both were passionate lovers of music, and amateur performers of no mean grade. Lee enjoyed a quartette or a chorus at his office, when the day's business was over and the public shut out; and when Thorne consented to drop in during the evening, the party was selected with a care that made admittance to it a high compliment. The liquor case was never produced on these occasions; not an oath or unseemly jest ever offended the senses of the most honored guest, who, on his part, smoked his cigar, related the best stories, argued most eloquently upon graver subjects, and sang the finest bass of the whole company.

"I am in hopes that a wonderful work of grace is about to commence among our young men. Have you observed their constant attendance upon the ordinances of the sanctuary, Mr. Thorne?" asked a good elder of the pastor.

Thorne replied briefly, that he had noticed the pleasing fact to which he referred. He did not dampen the brother's congratulatory zeal by reminding him that he was the only person in the congregation or town who had ever rebuked him for hunting, riding, fishing, and singing with these very young men—"consorting with the irreligious," he termed it, in the protest he felt "drawn out" to make to the erring youthful divine. Thorne's answer then had been to point out a passage in the Bible lying upon the study table, and request the reprover's opinion thereupon.

"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!"

The elder's memory was less faithful, or he traced no connection between the course he deprecated and the circumstance over which he rejoiced, for he continued, "Don't you think, Mr. Thorne, it would be well for you to speak

a solemn word or two, in private, to some of those straying souls? 'In season, and out of season' you remember!"

"Yes, sir—especially *in* season!"

"Of course, sir!—certainly! I only threw out the idea by way of suggestion."

We may observe in passing, that most of these suggestions were "thrown out" by the minister, also. Not that the obligations of his office were not heavy upon him. There were hours of many nights, when the solicitous elder snored upon his pillow, unhaunted by anxieties for the church he sometimes feared would be neglected by the shepherd, in his fondness for worldly follies—when he, whom he condemned for remissness in this solemn work, walked the floor of his study or chamber, in agony like that of old John Welch, whose cry to his wife's petition that he would seek rest, was: "Woman! how can I sleep with this burden of souls upon me!"

But Thorne was too skilful a fisherman to use the same apparatus for catching trout and shad; to expect to capture sinners by force, and cram the bait down their throats. He knew, by experiences he did not choose to impart to his suggestive friend, how kindly and gratefully the seasonable word was received, when, seated side by side, as men and companions, he laid his hand upon the shoulder or knee of one of these harum-scarum Kentucky "boys," and pleaded with him in behalf of his soul and his God. His personal attractiveness had broken up the disgraceful Sabbath habits of this set. It was now his policy to lead them, by the same means, within the sphere of higher influences. In Lee he felt an interest, deep to painfulness. He coveted this intellect, these energies, this heart, for the Master's service. An overt, untimely attack would have disgusted him he hoped to win, and he angled very warily.

Lee, whose reputation as a lawyer was second to none in

the state, was engaged to defend Dr. Stanton's will, and he took hold of the cause with alacrity and vigor; strengthening the solid fabric of his own side; laying stone to stone, argument to argument;—and ferreting out the inconsistencies and weak points of his antagonist; tracking him on his doublings and windings, like a sleuth-hound. As he proceeded, he confided each step, each discovery, each newly-built stronghold, to Thorne, and the knowledge of this custom divested his second remark, this noon, of its seeming abruptness.

"I looked in to let you know how we were getting on."

Thorne pushed the cigar-stand toward him.

"No, thank you. I have just smoked with Dr. Fairchild. He is one of your church-members. I wish you would indoctrinate him as to the importance of holding a lucid and decided opinion upon a subject which he has studied for three months. His miserable, non-committal way of giving in his testimony, is going to be the hitch in our machinery. He has been in my office for the last hour, boggling and shifting in a manner that put me out of all patience. Said I, at length, 'Doctor, you have to bear evidence to one of two things. Either the testator was sane, or the victim of temporary aberration of mind, when he added that codicil and signed the will. Is it your conscientious belief that Dr. Stanton was intellectually incapable of disposing of his estate?'

"'Why, no, Mr. Lee, I cannot say that! He looked and acted like one in the full possession of his reason;' and then he went over the death-bed scene, for the fortieth time.

"'All right!' I replied. 'You have only to testify to that effect, and we have no further use for you.'

"'Well, but, sir—there are some things which I cannot reconcile with this view'—and with that he ran through the case backward, as one may say—quite reversing his

former theory. He will give us trouble, I am afraid, when Harding cross-examines him. I wish you would talk with him."

"I have done so—or, rather, he has brought his difficulties to me, several times. His objections are sincere, groundless as they appear to us. The most knotty point to him is Dr. Stanton's apparently irrelevant allusion to his grandson, whose name he had not been heard to mention before in years. If his intellect wandered then, why may it not have strayed previously? This is the abstract of his argument, I believe."

"Exactly! he rehearsed it twenty-five times, at least, today. I have serious thoughts of impeaching *his* sanity, and thus putting him *hors du combat*, as a witness for or against us. To me it is perfectly clear that the deceased intended by the phrases, 'Not her only child,' and 'Henry,' to explain that if Miss Hartley were not the only surviving grandchild—if her brother were still alive, the provisions of the testament would have been different. As to this stuff some fools are prating, about repentance at the eleventh hour, for his just severity to the young good-for-naught—that wont go down with people who knew Dr. Stanton or his grandson."

"I disbelieve it for another reason—the countenance and gestures of the dying man. Action, immediate and energetic, was palpably his desire. Yet, Lee! the more I ponder that scene, in all its minutiæ, the more am I convinced that there was a wheel within a wheel—a background of motive, to which we have not penetrated. Why had Dr. Stanton suffered his will to lie unaltered for the three months that had elapsed since the child's death? why ask me casually to sketch a new one, from which his lawyer might prepare a more formal document, and leave this unsigned, if he esteemed the changes he made so necessary? He was prompt and methodical in business, and this procrastination,

when considered together with the terrible anxiety of his last hours, is the contradiction that baffles *me*."

"It would perplex me if I had not seen hundreds of similar and worse cases, in persons as systematic and upright in other affairs as was he. The best of men—and Dr. Stanton belonged to this class—sometimes dislike to make premature arrangements for a certain event, which may, nevertheless, be many years distant, and I have often noted that this reluctance increases rather than lessens, as they grow older. A man who would cheerfully have made his will at twenty-one, thinks, at seventy, that there is time enough and to spare, for the disagreeable job."

"Dr. Stanton had none of this un-Christian repugnance to contemplating death. His views upon the subject accorded with yours, and his practice was in harmony with them. I have told you before, how decidedly he expressed himself with regard to this, upon his last afternoon of health."

"He evinced, then, none of the excitement and anxiety that disturbed his last moments?"

"None. He was agitated—but by reminiscences, not anticipation."

"Ah, yes! I recollect. He was talking about poor Willie Bent. I wonder if that fellow will ever turn up! He was a noble, gifted boy, with one great weakness—he loved and trusted his brother-in-law. Harry Hartley blights every good thing he touches. But to return! Another of Dr. Fairchild's crotchets is, that this stroke, paralytic or apoplectic, or whatever it was, was caused by some violent mental shock."

"It was given after he parted from me, then. He left home, in good spirits, and, as I informed Dr. Fairchild, was so collected, so little preoccupied by his own thoughts, as to unfold, as he rode along, a letter of no possible interest to himself, which I put into his hand, in saying 'Good-day!'"

"By the way, I may as well have a look at that letter," said Lee, carelessly. "Not that it can have any bearing upon the case, except as proving self-possession and freedom from care, on the part of the testator—but it will do no harm for me to inform myself personally as to its contents. Have you it here?"

"I believe so. I carried it in my pocket for a week or more, after it was returned to me, and finding it there one day while sitting here, put it away in my desk. Its right place is in a packet I have in my trunk, at the boarding-house. It came into my possession in a singular manner."

He had mislaid it, it seemed, and while rummaging in pigeon-holes and portfolios, gave Lee a hasty account of his unfortunate classmate's fate.

"Here it is, at last!" he interrupted himself to exclaim. "I hoped, for a time, that it might serve as a clue to the discovery of Hosmer's friends, but it has failed me thus far, and I never expect now to unravel the mystery."

He smoothed out the sheet, and passed it to the lawyer. A smothered ejaculation escaped Lee, at sight of the writing. Suppressing it, he read the letter once, twice, three times—his eye keen, while his countenance was immobile. Then he let it fall to his knee, and studied intently for some minutes.

"You are sure"—he said, in a measured tone, through which trembled, despite his iron will, some hint of the repressed eagerness—"you are prepared to certify, upon your oath, that this is the identical letter you delivered to Dr. Stanton that afternoon—which was subsequently found open, and without the envelope, in the carriage, from which he was lifted in an insensible condition?"

"I am, most certainly! What of that?"

"This is not chance! There is a Providence above us, and this is His work!" said Lee, reverently. "Thorne! I

have learned, through my researches into Hartley's four years' wanderings, that, while in Mobile, his *alias* was Austin. I know his handwriting as well as I do my own, likewise the cipher he devised, of his initials, and adopted when a boy. I have several notes directed to myself, written by him before he ran away, which bear that signature. He wrote this letter! His grandfather might well struggle, as for life, to add that codicil. After reading this, he knew that Miriam was 'not the only child,' that the story of 'Henry's' death was a fiction. My dear sir! are you going to faint?"

"No!" Thorne threw up the window, that the fresh air might dispel the dizzy sickness which made him reel. "I am better now," he said, coming back to his seat. "*Can* this be so?"

"It is true as gospel! What a splendid point I shall make of it! Hurrah! Verdict for the defendants! Hurrah!"

He sprang up and waved the letter around his head, in an extravagance of glee totally foreign to his customary phlegm. Thorne sat still, very pale, but no longer faint.

"This is what Hartley meant by charging me with falsehood, when I said that I believed he had died nearly five years ago—this, the interpretation of his unfinished sentence!"

"Precisely! He forgot himself in his rage. 'You know you wrote—' he said, and stopped there. He received your letter of inquiry, but did not, for obvious reasons, care to reply. Yes, my adventurous gentleman! my sporting Janus! I will show up both your faces at once! Before many days have passed, everybody shall know what *you* have written, and to what purpose! Yours has been a long rope, but you have hung yourself at last!"

He could not sit down, but roamed up, down, across the study floor, apostrophizing the doomed plaintiff. A throng

of thoughts were trooping in upon Thorne's brain—a tumult of emotions agitating his soul. Afar off was a dim, fixed speck of light, toward which the waves were steadily bearing him. He let his companion walk, soliloquize and exult as he liked; but when his ecstasies had subsided into a semblance of his ordinary deportment, and he made a motion to go, Neale stayed him.

"Sit down, Lee, for a moment! I want your help. I think I have found out who James Hosmer was!"

Mr. Fry called at Mrs. Hartley's door that afternoon, and asked to speak with Miriam for a moment. She came running down-stairs at the summons.

"You have bad news for me! I see it in your face!" she said, catching her breath, and laying her hand upon her heart.

"It is nothing new! only a confirmation of what we have sometimes feared might be the case. Do not let it afflict you too much!" replied her guardian, soothingly. "Certainty is always more easily borne than suspense. Take this packet to your room, and read it alone. If you desire further particulars of the story you will gather from these papers, come to me. Fanny sends her love and her sympathy. Good-bye!"

Miriam flew, but very unsteadily, back to her chamber, and tore off the cover of the small bundle. There fell into her hand a letter directed to herself, in Mr. Thorne's handwriting. "Read this first!" was inscribed beneath the address. She broke the seal.

"My Very Dear Friend:—It is now three years since the accompanying papers were given into my care by the Faculty of the College in which I was then a student. They were found among the effects of a classmate of my own, whose sudden death excited the deepest interest of all con-

nected with the institution. My room adjoined his: I chanced to be the one who first discovered the fact of his decease, and to me was assigned the sad duty of examining his correspondence, &c., in the hope of finding out the name and residence of his relatives or friends, that intelligence of the occurrence might be conveyed to them. My search led to none of the results we had expected—for at that time I had no suspicion that the name by which my neighbor was known in college—James Hosmer—was not his real one. Inquiries and advertisements met with no better success, and we committed the body of the unknown youth to the grave. A miniature and a lock of hair which he wore next his heart in life, rest there in death.

"It is now but three hours since I first had reason to imagine that James Hosmer and your friend William Bent were one and the same person. May Our Father give you strength to support this new sorrow! For a while I shrank from the task I yet felt was binding upon me, of communicating these tidings to you—but you should know the worst—the agony of protracted suspense should be ended at last. It will be a mournful satisfaction to you to hear that your friend's character, as a man and a student, while among us, was irreproachable, and that he was followed to the tomb by the instructors and associates, whose admiration for his talents and indefatigable industry was heightened by regrets for his untimely fate. His death was unexpected, or he would have received all the attention, in his last hours, which brothers could have showed to those of their own blood. To you, as the nearest friend of the deceased, I transfer the charge committed to me on that sorrowful night. Would that I had words, from the full depths of my sympathy, to comfort you under this bereavement! These are the 'clouds that return after the rain;' but be assured, there is mercy concealed in every one that overcasts your present

existence. I can only remind you of the epitaph you wished to write above others lost and loved. 'In the world to come, eternal life!' I hope, I believe, it is *his*, no less than theirs.

"Faithfully,

"NEALE C. THORNE."

On his way to the boarding-house supper, Thorne was overtaken by one of Mr. Fry's servants, with a note.

"MY DEAR MR. THORNE:—Miriam will pass the night at our house. Her desire to hear more respecting the last days of our poor friend is so intense, and Hugh's information so scanty, that I take the liberty, without consulting her or him, of begging you to come in to supper, and spend the evening. *I* dare not let her know that I have heard any thing beyond the bare fact of Willie's death, lest she should find out from my blabbing tongue, that this is more of her brother's work. Is there no justice upon earth for such Heaven-daring, Heaven-forsaken wretches?

"Wrathfully, but discreetly,

"F. F."

CHAPTER XXX.

MRS. FRY ASSISTS PROVIDENCE.

MIRIAM was conversing earnestly with Mr. Fry when Thorne entered the parlor. The lamps were not yet lighted, and he was thankful for the veil of twilight between his face and theirs. Her hand was cold and tremulous, as it touched his, and she returned no verbal response to his greeting. Until Mrs. Fry's bustling entrance, the gentlemen sustained the whole weight of conversation.

"This is very good in you, Mr. Thorne!" she began, flitting up to him, silks rustling and streamers in a quiver. "I was just saying to Hugh, to-day, that it seemed an age since you had eaten one of my suppers. And, don't you think? I have coffee and Sally Lunn and beefsteak, to-night! Isn't that what Mr. Peter Magnus would call a coincidence?"

"Is that an insinuation that I am drawn hither by such gross considerations?" answered Thorne, although her gayety grated upon his feelings, which were all for the silent member of the circle, in her sore-hearted desolation.

"Now, be quiet! You intellectual giants are as dependent upon solid bread and beef, as are the veriest numskulls living. You ought to see Hugh eat supper on court-days! His appetite is absolutely—"

"Gigantic!" supplied Mr. Fry, as she paused for the adjective.

"Just that, my dear! I was about to say 'canine,' but

one doesn't quite like to call her husband a puppy. Now to supper, with what appetites we may!"

The redundance, the overflowing, the outgushing, the foam and the spray of the little woman's spirits, that evening, defied her utmost efforts to keep them down. Miriam's sad eyes; Thorne's grave politeness; her husband's warning looks, sent her to her pet Valley, some dozens of times during the meal, but she was up again—as she would have said—"in a jiffey." She rattled on about every thing and nothing; neared dangerous points, and sheered off, with a frightened celerity, that called the attention of everybody to the peril she had been in—altogether, conducted herself in such a flighty fashion, that Thorne drew a long sigh of thankfulness, when they arose from the table, and she remained in the dining-room. The more decorous portion of the company were scarcely settled in the parlor, and their nerves beginning to grow more quiet, when her flounces brushed briskly along the passage.

"Hugh, darling! there's some one here who wishes to see you!"

"Excuse me!" said Mr. Fry to his guests, and his better half fairly swept him out, shutting the door after her.

"Now—tell me all!" said Miriam hastily. "I could not talk about it in their presence. Tell me every thing!"

Her frank vehemence took him by surprise. It was the free earnestness of a sister inquiring for a brother, or a wife for news from her husband, rather than the trembling anxiety of a betrothed maiden, to glean tidings of the beloved one. But then, he recollected how one mighty passion levels the arbitrary customs of man's making, and marvelled no more. He told her all he meant she should know;—the blameless deportment, the patient toil, the scholarly reputation of her lover; the time of his death, and its suddenness; the kindly pity manifested by all who had known

him, when the event was made public; how sacredly he had treasured his sister's letters, and another package which, in obedience to the injunction written upon its cover, was burned unopened. Of the slow torture of starvation; his habits of seclusion and pinching economy; of the touching appeal to his robber and tormentor, found unfinished in his portfolio; of the other letter, whose authorship he had learned that day, he said nothing. In mercy to her, he withheld the most fearful features of the midnight tragedy; but what he was obliged to relate, bowed her heart with anguish. He had seldom seen her shed tears, but they flowed freely as the tale went on. He was grateful for this softer type of sorrow; for, remembering the stony woe with which she had seen her boy die, and her grandfather brought home a living corpse, he had dreaded this interview. She spoke but once, until the narrative was concluded—a sobbing murmur, as he mentioned the treasured letters—

"Oh, friend! Oh, faithful friend!"

It required the full courage of the man to carry Neale through the sad recital. He did his duty nobly—generously—for what was the dead man to him, beyond the interest of their common humanity? What need was there that he should revive in her bosom tender memories of her girlhood's betrothal, by dwelling upon the fine qualities of mind and heart that had won the girl's love and secured the woman's constancy? It was all said! His tongue had not faltered, nor his resolution fainted. He was silent, resting his brow upon his palm, listening to the rising March wind, and the struggling sigh, that mingled with its moan, from the burdened heart of the mourner. Her weeping ceased ere long.

"I cannot thank you as I would, Mr. Thorne, for your goodness to my friend—"

"I did nothing! I deserve no thanks!" he interrupted, earnestly.

"I must speak of it! But for you, his fate would have remained wrapped in impenetrable mystery. That cruel letter from New York did most to mislead us. Mr. Fry says it was unquestionably a scheme to extort money from Grandpapa! Can you conceive of the cold-blooded depravity that could pen such a falsehood, when poor Willie had lain for months in his grave? Yet it must have been the work of some one who had known him and us!"

Thorne said nothing. Whatever the law might do in defence of the sister's rights, he would not blacken the brother's character in her eyes, or accuse an absent enemy.

Miriam resumed, musingly. "True, noble heart! It wrings mine to think of those two solitary, toilsome years; his death far away from home and friends!—his nameless grave! How little we foresaw this, when we frolicked together in those happy old times, when neither ever dreamed that there was so much suffering in the whole world as we each afterward endured! We were happy and hopeful—one united family, until that fatal rumor of their parents' disgrace crept after the two blameless children, like a poisonous snake. It nearly killed Willie! Amelia was less sensitive, and she had her husband and child for consolation. Then that vile, groundless charge against himself, to which I cannot bear, even now, to allude, filled up the cup of humiliation, and we could not persuade him to stay any longer with us. I am *glad* you knew him! I have so often longed to talk with you about him—but his history was invested with so much of painful uncertainty, that I weakly recoiled from the difficult task of explanation and probably defence. I could not endure to hear you blame or doubt him. I am *very* glad that you knew Willie! I do not wonder that you loved and mourned him."

At another time Thorne would have felt uncomfortable at this inference from his carefully-worded recital of the cir-

cumstance, of his intercourse with Hosmer, or Bent. Now, other emotions were merged in amazement, at the tone of the confidence, of which he was the pained, yet willing recipient. It seemed, indeed, as she had said, a relief and a pleasure to talk to him of her lost lover; to recall the fresh, sweet souvenirs of the merry spring-time of their then united —afterward sadly-severed lives. This was not in conformity with Miriam Hartley's delicate sense of love's holy secresy; nor this fluent, child-like strain of retrospection—these eyes that sparkled through the clouds, almost into a smile, at times, the deep, speechless agony of a newly-widowed heart.

"You spoke of a miniature," she said. "It was doubtless Amelia's. He loved her very tenderly."

Thorne looked at her, bewildered by the apparent sincerity with which this was said. She did not notice his inquiring gaze.

"She was very pretty, and resembled her brother more in feature than expression. Both had fair hair and blue eyes. Amelia's were extremely beautiful. Her son had the same."

"Mrs. Hartley was the younger of the two, was she not?"

"She was, by three years. In some respects she was not her brother's equal, yet we were very fond of her—or *I* was. Her love for her husband and brother was her master emotion. She saw no fault in either; laughed at, and excused the wildest frolics of 'Prince Harry' and 'Poins,' as she called them. Perhaps a different course—but it is worse than vain to think of that now! How strange that you should have lived with us, for so many months, without a suspicion of what you have to-day discovered! Mr. Fry says that you were led to a knowledge of the truth by some clue furnished by Mr. Lee."

"Say rather by many slender, almost invisible threads,

abruptly twisting themselves into one. You have touched one of these in referring to your sister's pet names for her husband and brother. Mr. Lee recollected that she often called one of them 'the Prince,' and the other 'Poins,' while her favorite title for yourself was 'Sunbeam.'"

"It was! when have I thought of it before? Poor Amelia! But I do not recollect that she gives me this name in any of the letters you sent me."

"I remember perfectly that she does."

"I must have overlooked it!" She took the packet from her work-bag. "Yet I thought that I read them all."

"Allow me!" Thorne took the letters. "This is it!" he said, unfolding the latest of the series. "It had slipped into one of the others."

"Ah!" she checked her reading to exclaim. "The unpleasant rumors of which she speaks related to their sad family history. They reached us while Willie was at the University. She could not prevent his hearing them, after he arrived at home."

She read on, and Thorne watched her intently. There was a sadder, but a softer shadow at the mention of the "baby" she was described as singing to sleep; then a vivid blush, that looked like indignant fire, ran over neck and face.

"Is it possible! How could she—." She refolded the letter, creasing it hard, and returned it to the bundle. "I do not understand how this escaped my eye, when I read them before."

Her expression said so decidedly—"I wish I had never seen it!" that Thorne answered it.

"I am sorry that I called your attention to it, if it has awakened painful memories!"

"Oh! it is of no consequence—only—I am surprised and grieved. I could have dispensed with this additional illus-

tration of the old saying—'Save me from my friends, and I will save myself from my enemies!' The momentary asperity passed from face and accent. "Yet there were many excuses to be made for her disingenuousness to me—her seemingly wilful misconstruction of my feelings. The miniature was given to her—I never knew that she had parted with it. It is human nature to believe what we wish, instead of what we are told, and although I did not suspect it before, it appears that she did wish—" she halted in her indiscreet betrayal, blushing redly. "Excuse me, Mr. Thorne! Our talk to-night has been so like one of our old study-chats, and I have undergone so much excitement this afternoon—"

"Do not wound me by apologies for a renewal of the confidence I have always invited and prized!" But he tried in vain to speak like the friend of old, unmoved except by sympathy with her emotion. "May I finish your sentence, as I have often done others, for you? 'It appears that she did wish' you to return her brother's love."

No reply, beyond a silent droop of the head.

"And this you did, in time?" pursued Neale, hoarsely.

"Never!"

The frank brow was raised; the truthful eyes looked full into his for a second—only one! She could not support the brightness that flowed up from their depths—joy, that was rapture—love so passionate and mighty, that they flooded every feature with glory.

"Miriam!" She trembled at the thrilling tone, fraught with feeling and manly purpose. "Look at me again, and repeat what you have said! It is high time we understood one another!"

An hour had passed. The March storm was waxing furious without. Sheets of rain drenched the closed shutters; roared upon the piazza roof; gushed and gurgled, with musical violence, in the leaden pipes at the corners of

the house. Blackness and wind and torrent were abroad—in the parlor were summer warmth and rosy light, like a June sunset—the commingled radiance of lamp and fire.

"Darling! do you hear the rain?" Neale lifted the blushing face from his shoulder, and gazed into it with a fond, mirthful smile. "What does it say to-night?"

"Many pleasant things, while we sit here. I hope it will abate before you go. You will get very wet, if it does not. There are poetry and prudence for you!" said Miriam, saucily.

"I like the combination in this instance. It means that we will never be cast down by the storms that buffet us while we are together."

"Then, why do you sigh?"

"Not at that thought, assuredly! You will not let it make you too sad, if I tell you the associations recalled by your arch look, just now—the expression that has often perplexed me, set me to wondering where I first saw it?" He clasped her hand more firmly. "I had a vision of a lonely grave, far away. No kindred dust lies near it; no tears are ever shed above him who sleeps there; but, love, it is *your* likeness that lies upon his breast! We will not forget him, in our happiness—the grandeur of his self-sacrifice; his steadfast love, that hoped against discouragement—in death itself, for a return. It is an honor to any woman to have been so beloved. I am glad that he had, for a stay, during the last dreary months of his life, the belief that he could yet, by the might of his devotion, change your sisterly attachment into the affection he longed to awaken. I am glad that he died before a refusal from your lips crushed his hopes forever."

"And some day, we will—" she could not go on.

"Yes! some day, we will remove all that is earthly of our friend to our beautiful grave-yard—will lay him to rest by his sister's side; will tend his grave, as we do our grand-

father's and our precious boy's. Is that what you would have said?"

She pressed his hand reverently to her heart.

Mrs. Fry had kept watch and ward over her refractory spouse, all that rainy March evening. He was far from sharing in her conviction that it was the highest duty of hospitality for them to leave the parlor to the young people.

"In my day, I had to *make* an opportunity for private conversation with you, and valued it all the more for the pains it cost me to get it. If Mr. Thorne has any thing to say to Miriam, he is artful enough to contrive a time and place for the disclosure, without our forcing it upon him, in this glaring fashion. I, for one, am going back to them. It is positively rude for us to absent ourselves so long!"

But when he would have arisen, he found a weight upon his knee—not a heavy one, it is true, but an impediment, that, joined to the stricture of a pair of arms about his neck, and the temptation of a rosy mouth, pursed prettily within half a foot of his own, was an effectual clog upon his threatened action.

"Now Hugh! you blessed, stupid, dearest old darling! don't you see the difference in the two cases? You hadn't loved me to distraction, for almost a year, and been interfered with by meddling old-maid cousins and ruffian brothers, besides having your mouth sealed by the belief of my prior attachment and engagement, to a man who might pop in at any minute from the side-scenes. You could march into Pa's parlor, at any time of day you liked, and be sure of a welcome, not only from me, but the rest of the family —while Mr. Thorne runs the risk of being waylaid by that horrid brigand of a Harry Hartley, every time he goes near Miriam's home. If this couple were only friends, there could be no symptom of impropriety in giving them an interview of two or three hours, when they have not met for

so long. As it is, I am as certain that the result of my stratagem, this evening, will be the marriage of these tried and faithful lovers, as that I am your happy little wife, you sober, provoking, stubborn, old angel, you!"

"And you think that Miriam, with her sensitive delicacy, will be obliged to you for shutting her up with a young man, for the express purpose of bringing about an understanding and a declaration!" rejoined the husband, with a desperate effort to appear stern under the kisses that punctuated and followed this string of epithets.

"Hugh Fry! it grieves me to the heart to say it of you, but that observation is positively coarse and unfeeling! I *do* think this, sir—that it is sinful—presumptuously sinful in mortals to interfere with the designs of Providence! Now, Providence decreed that Mr. Thorne should be the means of making known to us Willie Bent's fate, and likewise put into his hands a key that, if rightly used, will unlock to him the door of life-long happiness. I was struck dumb, almost, when Miriam, in the innocence of her imagination, came in to tell me about the letters and other proofs of the identity of Willie Bent with Mr. Thorne's poor student, and I found out, by a little cross-examination, that would not have disgraced my clever husband, that this figment, circulated and believed by every body, about the early engagement and Dr. Stanton's opposition, and Willie's despair, and Miriam's constancy, was all humbug and fiddle-de-dee."

"Miriam told you that—did she?"

"Not in those words. I only said, unconcernedly as I could: 'Milly dear, there used to be a story afloat that you were engaged to poor Willie—was it true?'"

"Your cross-examination had the quality of directness—to say no more! What said Miriam to this polite query?"

"She answered, like the sensible, upright girl she is—'No, Fanny! Willie was the best friend I ever had. I

loved him very dearly—better, if possible, than I did Harry; but I never dreamed of marrying him. I thought you knew that!' So, to prevent suspicion, I turned the subject to something else, and by and by slipped out of the room and scribbled off a line to Mr. Thorne"—

"Soho! his coming was not such a 'coincidence,' after all! Fan! Fan! I am afraid you have been taking lessons of Cousin Clarice in manœuvring. Don't try it again, dear!"

"But, Hugh! I was only helping out Providence! Don't you see how the thing is bound to work? Miriam will inquire and talk about Willie, and presently Mr. Thorne will insinuate the self-same question I asked outright, and she will answer as truly as she did to me, and *voilà tout!* Presto! from despair springs up hope—from misery joy—from single woe, married blessedness! I am a magician!" and she clapped her hands behind her husband's neck, and "blessed" him again, as "the best, dullest, kindest, handsomest Darby, that ever had a happy, naughty Joan for a torment and a partner!"

Mr. Fry gave up and gave in to her fancy, as he generally did, and they were still talking over their own love-making, when they heard Thorne's voice in the hall. The small matron hopped from her perch and darted into the passage. As she did so, she caught sight of Miriam shrinking back within the parlor-door. This slight evidence of shyness was enough for the acute match-helper.

"You are not thinking of going out in this awful storm, Mr. Thorne! Do you imagine that we will countenance self-murder? Hugh! make him stay!"

"Indeed, you had better do so, Mr. Thorne," said the host. "It is raining heavily, and you have a long walk before you. It will not be your first occupancy of our prophet's chamber."

Miriam was standing near when Thorne opened the front door to look out. A powerful gust nearly tore the lock from his hand; a wild dash of spray beat into the hall. But amid the roar and rush, he heard her low exclamation; saw her imploring look; recognized with a proud heart-glow, the truth that his comfort and health were no longer matters upon which he alone had the right to decide.

"I accept your kind proposal, with many thanks!" he said to his friends, and they all went back together to the fire.

Mrs. Fry's womanly memory suggested to her, as a happy thought, that Miriam should be made to sit in the great crimson chair, that in summer stood in the alcove window, and which was now wheeled to a corner of the hearth. While the others fell into a quiet chat, the girl folded her hands and sat looking into the fire; her brow crowned with such sweet content, such tranquil, restful happiness, that the eyes of more than one turned to her continually, in affectionate admiration. The shadow of sorrows past but made softer, not less beautiful, the sunshine of Love. She had been forbidden to anticipate further trial, and she obeyed the command with glad docility. The tone of the conversation between the three friends was subdued, and there were thoughtful pauses, in which all seemed to hearken to the pelting, pattering rain, but there were only happy faces around the fireside. Even Mrs. Fry's sparkling eyes were misty, and her lips quivered, while they smiled.

By the time that she arose from her knees, after the evening prayer had been said, she was quite herself again, and fluttered off upon some improvised errand to the upper story. Neale followed Mr. Fry into the library, whither he went to extinguish the lights, and to see that the fire was safe.

"If you are in no haste to retire, I should like to have a few minutes' talk with you."

"I am entirely at your service." The guardian refrained from looking up at the request. "I will wait for you here."

Miriam was standing dreamily upon the hearth-rug, in the drawing-room, still consulting the cabalistic characters flickering in the heaped-up bed of coals. She started at the entrance of some one, and her cheek took the hue of the fire, when she saw who it was.

"I came back to say 'Good-night!'" But instead of doing this, he passed his arm lightly about her, and they listened together to the din of the March tempest; both gazing into the changing embers; both thinking of the home and life they hoped soon to share with one another; of the happier abode, the unending existence beyond the shores of Time. Love, pure, fervent, enduring, as was theirs, cannot be satisfied, even in the earliest raptures of assured reciprocation, without this promise of perpetuity.

Neale's deep, mellow voice said aloud the words that Miriam was repeating mentally, as the pledge of this lasting union.

"'In the world to come, eternal life!' It shall be our motto, darling, and make this life abundantly more blessed."

He held her to him closely, for an instant, and left, with his first kiss upon her lips, a murmur in her ear and heart, whose echo was never to die away—the most ecstatic thrill—the dearest music a loving woman can ever feel and know—the name that is her glory and her joy forever—

"*My wife!*"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MINE EXPLODES.

"But my brother! your sister!" Miriam had said, when urged to plight her troth.

"Leave that to me," was the response. "The duty which those who love bear one another is paramount to all other earthly obligations, excepting filial respect and obedience. Your brother's authority over you is no more binding than are my sister's wishes upon me. I am a free man—free in this, as in all things else, to choose and act for myself. I *have* chosen, and I await but your will and that of Heaven, to proclaim that choice and claim my treasure."

He felt all that he said, and much more. In minor matters he was not unreasonably impatient of dictation—could yield gracefully, when expediency did not compromise principle—but in this affair he would brook no interference, whether from friend, relative, the world, or the church. Whatever may be the judgment of the worldly-wise and ecclesiastically-prudent regarding this independent and unbiassed action, Mr. Fry, having married for love himself, fully approved Mr. Thorne's selection of a wife and his manner of choosing her. Neither left out of view, however, the comfort and happiness it would bring to Miriam if an actual outbreak with Henry could be avoided, and Mrs. Hartley's consent to the marriage be obtained without her reference to the graceless reprobate whose influence over her was so potent. Thorne was desirous that the mother should be informed of his relations

toward the daughter before the trial of the will case. Should the verdict be in Miriam's favor, he shrank from the imputation of mercenary motives for his delay, which he felt sure would be hurled at him by the discomfited plaintiff and his party. Should the will be set aside, he wished for the right to offer the defrauded grandchild the shelter of his home—and hers. Mr. Fry was a lawyer, and had drawn up too many marriage contracts to be easily duped by protestations of unworldly designs and romantic devotion in matrimonial engagements, but he had the fairness to believe in the purity and singleness of this attachment, and the candor to tell Neale that he did so.

"I hope we shall throw Hartley in the suit, while I have some painful misgivings upon the subject. A disputed will is one of the most knotty and uncertain things to manage, in the whole range of our profession. Hartley's holding out so stoutly against any thing like compromise, is an unfavorable sign. He will have all or nothing. I have but one objection to your communicating immediately with Mrs. Hartley, and that I hardly dare mention, for fear of making you angry."

"Am I so irascible? Name it! I promise to bridle my temper."

"Whatever Mrs. Hartley knows her son will soon learn. If it can be proved by his lawyer's cross-examination of you in court, that you have a presumptive interest in the estate contested, it may weaken the force of your testimony with some. Whereas, if nothing is known of your relations to the sister, there will be no inconvenient questions asked."

"And do you imagine that a jury of my fellow-townsmen, who ought to know what honesty and religion are, would believe that I would swear to a lie, to save my own life, much less the property of my—my wife?"

There was a flash of pride in his face, and a peculiar ring in his voice, as he brought out the last two words.

"Honesty, as the world goes, and honesty, intrinsic and incorruptible, may look as much alike as gold and pinchbeck, yet are as diverse in nature when the test is applied," was Mr. Fry's answer. "Why should they not credit this as soon as suspect you of fortune-hunting? My opinion is, that the knowledge of your engagement had best be confined to yourselves, my wife and myself, until Hartley is legally ousted from the homestead, or placed in a position to turn his sister out, if he likes."

These and other arguments, if they did not change Thorne's purpose, yet prevailed upon him to postpone his call on Mrs. Hartley, until Miriam and her guardian should confer upon the subject. He repressed the desire to discuss the matter with her himself, in the interview they had next morning, before he went into town. At parting, a strong objection to Mr. Fry's projected delay presented itself.

"May I come and see you this evening?" he asked, thoughtless of every thing save his desire to be with her whenever he could.

She looked distressed. "I am afraid not! There is Harry, you know, and Mamma might think it strange."

Thorne's brow clouded. "True! yet this banishment does not suit a man of my temperament."

Miriam's face betrayed that it agreed no better with hers.

"And clandestine meetings would be equally objectionable to us both," continued Neale.

"You are right. We must be patient. Surely we ought to be able to bear a small trial now, when we have endured so many heavier ones in the past—and separately!"

He dwelt with delight upon the hidden meaning of this sentence, in his walk to the study—recalled the rising blush with which she said it, her voice dropping almost to a whis-

per, at the close—then upon the look she had not shamed to lift to his, as he said "Good-bye," even while the warm touch of his lip lingered upon the forehead, where, more brightly than ever, shone the legend to which he had so often longed to set this seal. By this—by all these tokens—she acknowledged him in the character he bore so exultingly, this bright spring morning—her betrothed husband!

There was no pretence of studying made for the first hour after he entered his sanctum. How could there be, when his chair commanded, accidentally, of course, a view framed by the window of a pretty cottage, whose evergreen shrubbery was bright and glossy after the night's rain, and the creeper clinging to the eaves, full of leaf-buds, that would be a curtain of verdure for the upper windows by midsummer? The shutters were closed, and the rooms bare. There had been times when he had experienced a chill and shudder at the thought of the silent, desolate chambers and fireless hearth, as he had seen them once when he went through the building alone. The key lay in his table-drawer now, and he determined that, before the day was over, he would again explore the premises, not with listless curiosity, as in the former visit—but with a vigilant eye to necessary and advisable improvements, and diligent examination into their capabilities to become a fitting abode for his bride. The long-vacant dwelling would be altogether another place when the sunlight and air were freely admitted to apartments, fitted up simply, but elegantly, in consonance with *her* taste—when, in the windows now blank and blind, fluttered draperies of lace and muslin, and over stair and floor bounded the elastic step—through hall and chamber resounded the cheerful voice of its mistress. He would exert all Love's arts to win back song and laughter to her lips and heart. He sighed at thought of the thorny, begloomed path she had trod—the grievous yoke she had borne in her youth—his noble,

suffering darling! and the thought passed into a prayer of thankfulness that, at last had been granted to him the privilege of becoming her comforter and protector—supplication for a blessing upon the lives that were henceforth to flow on together.

Presently his building plans assumed a visible shape. Drawing out a sheet of paper, he began to sketch, with a freedom and accuracy of touch, that bespoke him no indifferent draughtsman, the right wing of the cottage and the design of a bay-window, to be added to the same, in place of the narrow lattice that now disfigured the lower story. This was to be Miriam's library, boudoir, withdrawing room, or whatever she chose to call it. She had a partiality for bay-windows, and in the recess of this should stand her work-table and chair, just where he could see her, and exchange a smile, or a wave of the hand with her, whenever he raised his head from his desk. We may have our amused speculations, concerning the amount of writing and sewing that would be done in these circumstances. He believed that both would labor the more zealously, thus situated. A rap at the door caused him to thrust the sketch into a drawer. It was Mr. Lee's office-boy, with a note from his employer.

"I searched high and low for you, last night," it said. "Went to your lodgings as late as half-past eleven, but could gain no information as to your whereabouts. Fry tells me that you were detained at his house by the storm I disregarded in my anxiety to find you. Called twice again this morning, at Mrs. Scott's, with what success you know. A new card has turned up which is, I think, trumps. Excuse the nature of the technicality. It expresses what I mean, and I have not time to go into particulars. Would come to you instead of writing, but am playing bear-master, or trainer, to an animal, whose tractable qualities are not of the most praiseworthy kind, so I cannot leave the office which is

his temporary cage. Can you come around at ten A. M., *precisely?* Do not let any trivial engagement keep you away, since I greatly desire your presence. Cloak yourself well in imperturbability before coming, or you may show that you are astonished and shocked at some revelations which will be made, and I had rather you took matters, as I do, coolly. Not that you will hear bad news. All goes well for our side—but—pshaw! what business has a lawyer with feelings? Remember ten o'clock—punctually! Yours,

"LEE."

Thorne perused this riddle twice, before writing a reply. That it puzzled rather than alarmed him, was evident from his answer.

"MY DEAR SPHYNX:—I shall obey your call with a promptness surpassed only by my curiosity to learn the nature of these astounding disclosures. Until the appointed hour I remain, in wonder and faithfulness,

"Your friend, N. C. T."

He was punctual to the appointment, but found that others were yet more prompt than himself. Mr. Fry and Mayor Lewis sat at a round table in front of the fireplace, apparently waiting for other arrivals. Lee had answered Thorne's knock in person; for the door was locked—an uncommon occurrence at that hour. Mr. Fry met him as an expected visitor, but the Mayor was somewhat taken aback by his appearance.

"Our friend Lee has prepared some—ah—pleasant surprise for us this morning, I understand, Mr. Thorne, and believing, as I did, that it—ah—appertained to professional business, I was naturally not—ah—altogether prepared for seeing you. But we are always happy to—ah—welcome Mr. Thorne, anywhere, I am sure."

He looked the reverse of happy or comfortable, in saying this. Ignorant why he was summoned hither, and gaining no enlightenment from the discreet composure of his companions, he was exceedingly ill at ease in his mind. An approving conscience, void of past as well as present offences against laws human and Divine, is the best sedative one can have under suspense. This may account for the contrast between his deportment and that of the young pastor. The Mayor rolled his portly corporation to and fro, against the round back of the office-chair; joined his finger tips, after his usual fashion, and rumbled forth his sounding platitudes —but his "ahs" were ludicrously frequent; his florid skin was alternately of a purple red and a bilious yellow, and his eyes roved searchingly from one to another of the three other faces. Thorne had never appeared to better advantage than when his frank gentlemanliness and clear, thoughtful features were opposed to the underbred behavior and unquiet physiognomy of the pompous dignitary.

"Really, Mr. Lee," observed the latter personage, presently, looking at his watch, "the rest of your friends or guests, or—ah—clients, whichever they may be, are—ah—unwarrantably dilatory. It is already ten minutes past the hour—ah—designated."

"I expect but one more person, Mr. Lewis. He is neither a client nor friend of mine. I regret the trespass upon your valuable time, but must ask you to wait a little longer."

"I have an—ah—engagement in three-quarters of an hour, Mr. Lee."

"I hope not to detain you beyond that time, sir."

The knob of the door was twisted twice violently, and before Lee could reach it, there ensued a loud thump upon the panels. The late-comer was Henry Hartley.

"Here I am, you see! Why the deuce do you lock yourself up on this splendid day? I came near taking a sail,

instead of waiting upon you. Good morning, Mr. Fry! Mr. Lewis, how are you, now?"

He took no notice of Thorne, and dropped lazily into a chair near the door—overacted nonchalance, that imposed upon nobody, unless it were his future father-in-law.

"Will you oblige me by taking a seat at the table, Mr. Hartley?" requested Lee.

"Certainly, if you insist upon it, although I can't say that you offer very tempting fare. I am horribly bored by such, already."

"It is not probable that I shall invite you to many more banquets of this nature," rejoined Lee, taking up one of the pile of papers to which Hartley had pointed. "Like yourself, I am growing weary of *unnecessary* legal formalities."

Hartley eyed him sharply. The meaning emphasis had not escaped him.

"That is queer! I thought you lawyers made your living by that sort of thing."

"We do, sir—especially when we can dispense with our consciences and feelings. Unfortunately for our purses, but very luckily for your happiness and character, Mr. Fry and myself chance, each of us, to be possessed of these inconvenient articles. Otherwise, we should not have invited you to this private consultation. Not to weary you with preliminaries and the professional verbiage which you dislike, I will come, at once, to the substance of our business. And I beg leave to remind you, at the outset, that it is more to your interest to listen to, and weigh what I shall say, than it is to ours to make the statement.

"There has recently fallen into my hands the last letter which your grandfather, Dr. Stanton, ever read; which was seen by him for the first and only time, on the afternoon of his seizure with the illness that ended his life. This letter was addressed to one James Hosmer, purports to

have been written by 'Henry H. Austin,' of Mobile, and bears a date four years old—one year subsequent to the time of your supposed death by drowning. In compliance with my request, it was transferred to my keeping by one who knew nothing of its authorship and value, until I discovered these. I recognised the handwriting on the spot, likewise the cipher signature, an intricate blending of the three initial letters of the writer's *real* name. When further investigation has established the fact that at the very time this was written, you were residing in Mobile, under the assumed name of 'Henry H. Austin'—a favorite *alias*, which, by the way, you found useful to you elsewhere—in New York, for example—when this is proved, and added to the absolute identity of the handwriting with yours, we are no longer in doubt as to the cause of Dr. Stanton's fatal attack, succeeding, as it did, immediately upon the perusal of this document; nor can we hesitate to pronounce upon the validity of a codicil, made after this period, cutting you off from all share in his estate. So far from perceiving any trace of delirium, or incoherence in his efforts to assert that his granddaughter was not her mother's only child, and his enunciation of your name, we find, in these, conclusive proof that the testator was in the full possession of memory and every other faculty of reason—that his deliberate and conscientious intention was to disinherit you. It remains for you to say, Mr. Hartley, whether these, and other circumstances yet more discreditable in your past history, shall be made public, or whether you will quietly withdraw a suit, which, it is morally certain, will go against you. If this sounds like an extraordinary proposition, I need only state, in explanation, that it originated with Mr. Fry, as the representative of your grandfather's legatees, and is prompted by jealous respect for the family good name, and tenderness for your mother's and sister's feelings."

This comprehensive summary was delivered with a species of caustic courtesy, in which Lee was a proficient. If his inmost soul rejoiced in pinning his audacious adversary to the wall, if his professional pride was galled at doing this privately, instead of dragging the sheep's clothing over the wolf's ears in open court, the one had as little expression in his outward demeanor as the other.

Hartley heard him through—his bad, black eye never sinking under the piercing gleam that made each step in the development of the fearful odds against him a poisoned javelin in his breast. His one sign of perturbation was the restless stroking of his thick, black mustache over his mouth, where the sharp, white teeth seized and held it fast. They glittered wickedly in the smile that freed it.

"My gratitude to Mr. Fry for his respect and tenderness for the family honor would be more profound, if I were capable of understanding such disinterested kindness. His previous conduct in this suit has hardly prepared me for this exhibition of friendly consideration. If I comprehend the terms of the compromise he proposes, he means that I shall relinquish every thing without a struggle, and, since liberality is the order of the day, I am moreover expected to pay my own lawyer's fees, I presume! Hey, Fry?"

"I take it upon myself to promise that all the expenses of the unfinished suit will be assumed by the other parties, should you conclude not to prosecute the hopeless enterprise," responded Mr. Fry.

"Really, gentlemen, if this were the first of April, instead of the twenty-sixth of March, your joke would be laughable. Since it is not, pardon me for being slightly nauseated by your farce. I abandon a cause that is a matter of riches or starvation to me, almost upon the eve of its trial! scared from a position that is as sure as law and right can make it, by the rustle of a bit of paper, whose signature is an

avowed *alias*—which I can and will swear I never saw before, whose author, I had as lief swear, was the nameless person"—looking at Thorne—"who delivered the same to the ingenious counsel for the defence! The proposal would be an insult, were it not so absurd. I should defraud you, Mr. Lee, were I to deny you the opportunity of displaying your forensic abilities to a more numerous audience. I will meet you at Philippi!"

He arose and bowed around the table, with his wicked, wolfish smile.

"But, my dear Mr. Hartley!—is it—ah—wise to—ah—dismiss the matter so—ah—peremptorily?" blundered the dismayed Mayor, upon whose dull comprehension the foregoing story had fallen, as a thunderbolt splits the solid earth.

"'*Et tu Brute!*'" said the reprobate, with a malicious affectation of despair. "And you too are against me, Mr. Lewis! Ah, well! it is not every one who remembers past benefits as I do!"

"My dear boy! Harry, my son!" The Mayor clutched the young man's hand with his flabby claws. "You must know that I have only your—ah—advantage at heart!"

"Allow me, Mr. Lewis!" said Mr. Fry, calmly. "I think we can present other reasons, besides those we have already set before Mr. Hartley, why he should not draw down upon his head certain and irretrievable ruin."

"It is your business to use the ugliest words you can, I suppose," retorted Hartley. "But I advise you to choose them with more circumspection, if you don't want something harder than words in return."

"Ruin is an ugly word, I grant," interposed Lee. "But the thing itself is much uglier."

"That depends upon the shape it takes. Trot out your hobgoblin, and let me take a look at it!"

He sat down, rested his chin in his hands, his elbows on the table, and looked with sneering insolence at the lawyer.

An irreproachable illustration of the imperturbability he had enjoined upon his clerical friend, Mr. Lee arose, walked the length of the room, and unclosed the door of the inner and private office. Hartley's chair was exactly opposite to this, and a change came over his hardened visage at the apparition of a burly figure and a red, bloated face, from which eyes, full of enmity and cowardly ferocity, glowered upon him.

"Mr. Wilson, gentlemen!" said Lee. "Be seated, if you please, sir!"

He himself remained standing, midway between the witness and him whom he was here to accuse. Hartley was not so blind with stifled rage as to overlook the seemingly unimportant circumstance that the lawyer's tall, wiry form would inevitably intercept any rush he might make at his treacherous comrade, and that Lee's hand was buried in his bosom. His attitude was natural, and might easily have been accidental, but Hartley understood that violence was anticipated, and preparations made to defeat its end. The group at the table presented a strange variety of expression and emotion. The Mayor, fidgetty and vaguely disturbed, divided his uneasy regards between his son-in-law expectant, and his disreputable associate; Mr. Fry was grave and collected, his compressed mouth alone indicative of the interest he felt in the approaching scene;—while Thorne's changeful eyes and slight tinge of color told of strong, yet repressed excitement. Hartley's face had literally darkened with passion, at confronting his betrayer, but his teeth were fast shut, and, except that he again passed his palm downward over his mustache—a motion he repeated many times during the ensuing dialogue—he did not alter his position.

"Mr. Wilson, will you be so kind as to tell us where you

spent the night of the 19th of October, 18— ?" began Lee, courteously.

The date said nothing to the Mayor or to Thorne, but it was obvious that it startled Hartley.

The answer was ready—"At Rice's tavern, the half-way house between Limestone and F——. I drove over in company with a friend, whom I can produce, in a few days, if his evidence is needed."

"And the next morning ?"

"I went on to F——, with the same gentleman."

"Will you give us a short account of your proceedings after reaching that place ?"

"I went straight to my hotel—a plain, out-of-the-way place, kept by another friend—where I had left my baggage, two days before. I found, upon inquiring of him, that two gentlemen had arrived there, early that morning, in a buggy covered with dust, and with their horse nearly fagged to death. They were now in their room, up-stairs, which, by previous arrangement with my friend, the landlord, adjoined mine."

"You villain !" ejaculated Hartley.

"No interruptions, if you please, gentlemen !" The lawyer's sidelong glance kept watch over his prey, and his hidden hand stirred slightly. "Go on, sir !"

"So I went up softly to my chamber, and listened at the door between the rooms. I could see, too, through the keyhole." Some lingering remnant of regard for appearances made him add—"You see, gents, I knew my man! He owed me money, and I had tried to get some of it out of his brother-in-law the day before, and received only a part. He had to sell a horse to raise that, poor fellow! So my debtor had vowed to pay me at this very tavern, on this forenoon, and I had a notion of how he meant to raise the wind. He'd been down the river with me, for a month and more, and I

knew he wouldn't show his face at home—in fact, that he wasn't wanted there. 'Twas but natural that I should look sharp after my rights, and find out, if possible, whether he could pay me, and if so, whereabouts his gold mine lay. I peeped in, as I have said, and had a tolerably good view of my gentleman, leaning back in his chair—dusty and slovenly, as a fellow might be expected to look who had travelled six or seven hours in an open vehicle. He was quarrelling with his companion, who was walking up and down the floor.

"'Go back!' says my man—'and tell the whole story, if you like! My character is not so spotless that it can be damaged by a little mud.'

"'No!' says the other. 'You saved my life, once;—we are brothers, and I will not betray you, if only for the sake of your wife and child.' But he groaned out aloud—'Would to Heaven I had never lived to see this day!'

"Thinks I to myself—'My handsome friend has come near running his head into the noose—you may be sure!' I can't repeat the rest of the conversation—but there was some talk of a lost cap, that might create trouble. It was shot off, it seemed, and, by and by, my man remembered that the article did not belong to him after all.

"'I took it by mistake, the day I left home,' he said. 'It was just like mine, but I found your mark in it afterward.'

"At this, the other was awfully shocked. 'And *I* may be suspected of this infernal deed!' he said, and much more to the same effect, in a wild kind of way, that made me pity him, for he was the brother-in-law I mentioned just now—a generous, soft-hearted chap, and I knew that he had helped his sister's husband out of many a scrape.

"'It's no use going on so!' said my friend. 'The old gentleman wont let you be convicted, if he has to 'blow' upon me to prevent it. You stand a chance of being heir in my stead, if you play your cards well, and don't sacrifice your-

self to a romantic notion of saving me. That's your game, boy! He called me by name, I tell you, and wont stick at accusing me, if *you* are in danger. I am sorry I hit him so hard, but he took me by surprise. He had no business to disturb me! I was only helping myself to a small part of my lawful inheritance—'"

"Good Heavens!" The horror-stricken Mayor reeled in his seat. "Do you dare to assert that this gentleman—"

He drew his chair further from Hartley, and stared at him in speechless consternation. The interruption seemed to sever the spell of decorum Lee had laid upon the witness. His scowling smile was revolting to behold.

"I dare to assert, Mr. Mayor, that this *gentleman*, who is to marry your daughter, and to receive fifteen thousand dollars on the wedding-day—you see I am in the secret of the contract—that this fine fellow robbed, and tried to murder his grandfather, and not only let his innocent friend be tried for the crime, but, when the rest of the family believed him dead, lived, for two whole years upon this same friend, telling him pitiful stories of beggary and starvation, when he was the greatest 'swell' about town. Moreover, I 'assert,' that after Willie Bent's death, I, at the instance of his affectionate brother, wrote a letter to Dr. Stanton, begging for money for Bent, who, I said, lay sick in a New York hotel, which money the grandson had and spent!"

"Be careful, Mr. Wilson," cautioned Lee.

"I suppose I am rendering myself liable to indictment for forgery and conspiracy," rejoined the gambler, doggedly. "I don't care, provided I ruin *him!* I am state's evidence —I am, Hartley! You've beaten me three times, you remember! I bore it twice, for I had a use for you, and I knew that I should come out uppermost, at last! 'The third time never fails,' you know. That's the way with us bulldogs! We are slow to take hold, but we never let go!"

Any thing like the brutal glee, the ferocious delight, with which this was said, had never been seen before by any of the lookers-on. Mr. Fry and Thorne exchanged a meaning look, and were on the alert to prevent any retaliatory assault from Hartley. He retained the sense to perceive the futility of such an endeavor, or was stunned into momentary quiet. His palm still mechanically caressed his mustache; his eyes were fixed upon his vindictive accuser—a gaze under which the latter presently showed such signs of discomfort as a whipped hound, who is yet too stubborn and surly to submit, does, at sight of the lash. The brooding silence did not last long. Hartley addressed Mr. Lee, with an evil smile and mocking tone.

"I take it, sir, that your drilled witness has much more to say, that may interest the lovers of thrilling fiction. I must compliment you upon your wise choice of an instrument for the furtherance of your righteous designs. Not to waste time—may I request you, Mr. Mayor, to make out a warrant of commitment, or whatever you call it in the profession? It appears to be the mission of the family, of which I am an unworthy member, to furnish horrors for the good citizens of Limestone, and I flatter myself that this will be an interesting chapter in its tragic annals. If it is not too bold an infringement upon the fixed custom of the law's delays, we can have the trial now, and here. A pair of lawyers, a magistrate, a chaplain to shrive me, and a witness, who would also, with pleasure, officiate as my executioner! In the words of Holy Writ—'What wait ye for? Behold all things are now ready!'"

"Since the robbery and assault were committed beyond the bounds of the corporation, it is the county magistrate, and not the Mayor of Limestone, who should make out the warrant for your arrest," said Lee, whose well-curbed muscles expressed none of the horror depicted in the Mayor's

jaundiced complexion and starting eyes, or the disgust Fry and Thorne did not pretend to conceal. "Since it pleases you to make a jest of your disgrace, and the threatened retribution of just laws, our reluctance to expose and bring you to punishment, is greatly diminished. We had thought that, out of consideration to the family, which has already suffered fearfully on account of your faults, this story might be suppressed until—"

"What!" yelled Wilson, springing up. "Not bring him to trial! let him sneak off, with money in his pockets, when he ought to be slaving in a prison, with his head shaved and a ball on his leg! I *dare* you to hush this thing up! I'll have none of your trifling! I'll take him myself, and drag him to jail!"

"Very well!" Hartley stalked into the floor. The other three also arose. "Compose yourselves, gentlemen! Your protegé is in no danger from me. I have not a rope in my pocket, and he will never die by any thing else. Come, Jack! where is your pluck, man?" for Wilson—ingrain coward and bully—stood stock-still.

Hartley threw at him a jeering laugh. "I will let you know, to-morrow, what I think of your proposal, gentlemen of the court and jury! *Au revoir!* Mr. Lewis! a word in your ear, if you please!"

He linked his arm in that of the frightened, irresolute Mayor. Lee opened the door and let them pass. Wilson broke forth with a volley of objurgations, charging the lawyer with falsehood and foul play.

"See here, my man!" Lee's cold, hard tones interrupted the harangue. "You told me your tale gratuitously. I promised that you should repeat it in the presence of your enemy and these witnesses, without giving you my opinion as to its truth. You contradicted yourself a dozen times, in going over it first to me; and your version of it in the hear-

ing of these gentlemen was different still. You could not tell it alike twice, to save your life. I do not doubt that some parts of it are true. That your own share in the transaction is garbled and glossed over, I believe more thoroughly. Whatever Henry Hartley may have done, you were his accomplice, and shared the profits. An intelligent jury is not apt to attach much importance to the testimony of a witness who gained all he can relate by listening at a door and peeping through a key-hole, and who kept his knowledge of a nefarious crime for five years, revealing it, in the end, only that he might revenge himself for a personal insult. You can carry your goods to some other market. I will have nothing to do with so dirty a job. Don't swear, my friend! It is a bad habit."

Wilson started for the door, still growling his anathemas.

"A minute, more!" said Lee. "I advise you, unprofessionally, not to say any thing about that New York letter to the next man to whom you take this story. It may get you into trouble. Altogether, I think that Limestone will soon be too hot to hold either yourself or your principal. I charge nothing for the counsel. Good-day, Mr. Wilson!"

"Will he spread this horrible tale, do you think?" inquired Thorne, anxiously.

"Doubtful! he is half drunk now, and his hardihood will decline as he sobers. He would have been too much intoxicated to speak a coherent word, if I had not kept him here for the past two hours. When he came in, after breakfast, to repeat and confirm what he said last night, I saw at once, that he had imbibed large draughts of Dutch courage, and took measures to prevent him from becoming useless to us. He was drunk, last evening, and beside himself with rage against Hartley, on account of a drubbing which he gave him yesterday."

"And this—his accomplice—" Thorne shrank from mentioning the name—"What course will you adopt toward him? If he is indeed guilty of this atrocious crime, if the good name of another has suffered while he escaped—"

He turned away abruptly, and paced the narrow limits of the office, half-wild with the succession of frightful images that presented themselves, at thought of the conviction and punishment of the reckless sinner. The Roman firmness he had often displayed in the discharge of painful duty, failed when the vision of Miriam's mournful eyes gleamed before him.

"It is one thing to believe in his guilt—another, to be able to prove it," said Mr. Fry. "As Mr. Lee remarked—this Wilson's testimony is full of flaws—or was, as he delivered it, when unrestrained by the questions and influence of a sober man. My own belief is, that it would be impossible to convict Hartley upon such evidence, composed, as it is, mainly of the confused and fragmentary sentences he repeats as part of the conversation between the brothers-in-law. I discredit this pretended report of their talk. Yet it is evident that he is in possession of an important secret. For aught we know, he was an accomplice in fact, if not in action, in the burglary."

"If one was guilty, both were!" responded Lee. "They assuredly shared the booty."

"And Dr. Stanton knew his assailant! carried that knowledge with him to the grave!" exclaimed Thorne. "This is the key to his mysterious allusions to Bent;—to the sacrifices he had made to save the family name. Gallant, true soul! how cruelly was his wonderful fidelity repaid!"

"His name shall be cleansed from all lingering stain," said Mr. Fry, resolutely, "I charge myself with this; but, if possible, we would avoid arresting Hartley, upon the very questionable evidence before us. Our object, in springing

this mine—it may seem prematurely—was to rid the neighborhood and ourselves of him. If he absconds, the suit collapses, and the scandal will be nothing compared with the excitement of his exposure and trial. He must go! He will ruin his mother and break her heart, if this thing is carried out."

CHAPTER XXXII.

MOTHER AND CHILDREN.

MIRIAM was busy among her flower-beds, that afternoon, directing Parker as he dug and transplanted; herself glowing with a life and brightness long foreign to her; singing softly, unconscious that she did so, while aiding in the graceful work—when her brother called to her from the study window.

"Milly! step here a moment—will you?"

He seldom addressed her so pleasantly in these days, but she had noticed at dinner-time, that he comported himself toward her with unusual gentleness and politeness, and was the less surprised at his tone now.

"Mignonette in this bed, Uncle Parker!" she waited to say. "By the time you get the seed in, I will be back."

She walked into the room where were her mother and brother, swinging her garden hat from one finger, so like the light-hearted girl of last summer, that Mrs. Hartley said smilingly—"I am glad this fine weather does you so much good, my dear! I thought you would recover your health and spirits when you could get out of doors again. Harry has some news for you which will cheer you still more."

"Ah!" Miriam cast a quick look at her brother, who stood by the old-fashioned desk, that had been her grandfather's. The lid was thrown back, and a freshly-written sheet of paper lay upon the desk beside inkstand and pens.

"You had better tell her, Mother! It is like fire fighting

fire, when she and I encounter one another, and I have had enough of that kind of talk. I want to settle affairs without more bad blood, if I can."

Mrs. Hartley, thus directed, spoke to the point. "He has decided to abandon this unfortunate lawsuit, my daughter."

"Indeed! Why?"

"To gratify his mother!" The poor lady's eyes filled with proud, thankful tears. "He has seen, lately, that it was wearing upon my heart and strength—and offers, of his own accord to relinquish all claim upon your grandfather's estate, rather than see me suffer."

"I am glad to hear it!" She would have added—"For what consideration does he make the sacrifice?" but the recollection of his reference to her temper restrained her.

"He goes to L—— to-morrow, to inform his lawyers that they will not be needed at the next court, and to pay the expenses of the suit."

She colored a little, and Miriam knew who had advanced the funds to defray the costs. Silence was safety and prudence, and she remained quiet, winding and unwinding the ribbon about her finger.

"But, my love—" something seemed to rise in Mrs. Hartley's windpipe, just here—"I have been telling Harry that we will not let him suffer for his generous regard for our feelings. His noble decision leaves him poor, while we are rich beyond the need of most women. I will joyfully do all that I can for him, while I live, but you know how restricted is my ability to provide for him permanently. He says that you once offered to resign every thing to him, if he would withdraw this suit, but he would not take advantage of your liberality. Still, it is not just that he should lose every thing, because he was too honorable to rob you."

Miriam was used to her mother's one-sided reasoning, where Harry was concerned.

"What would be just, then, Mamma?" Her face was fast settling into rigid gravity.

"Why—we were—*I* was thinking that if you were willing to sign away the reversion—that is the term you used, wasn't it, Harry?—if you would execute a deed, promising to make over to him, at my death, that portion of the property which would by the will revert to you, it would be very generous in you and a great benefit to him."

"Not a present benefit, ma'am! I trust that your life may be spared, for many years to come."

"Thank you, dear! But do you not see that you would, by doing this, enable me to aid him materially, during my lifetime? All that I have would thus become virtually his, since there would be no account of expenditures rendered to you, or your heirs, at my decease. You may marry. It is very likely that you will—and in that event, your husband could claim whatever I might die possessed of, and your brother be left penniless."

Miriam's features were still; but in her throat might be seen a hurried throbbing; her hands clenched one another. She did not grudge the required gift. She felt assured that Thorne would approve whatever she did; that his pride, like hers, would revolt at the idea of succeeding to an inheritance, which her mother, if free to bequeath as she wished, would bestow upon her son;—but it is far easier to perform an act of voluntary self-denial than to resign one's rights at the behest of those who have no warrant, in law or conscience, for demanding the sacrifice. The sharpest sting was her mother's eagerness to deprive one child of all share in her wealth, that the other might be enriched; the undisguised partiality displayed for him, who, from his boyhood, had wrought only misery in her heart and home—above the loving daughter, who had never intentionally caused her a grief. Miriam did not know enough of the world to com-

fort herself with the reflection that this unjust and irrational preference is so constantly exhibited by those who are esteemed the best and wisest of parents, that it has ceased to be regarded as a phenomenon. Many, who, in careless or calm moments, have condemned the elder son of the parable, as ungenerous and unnatural, have gone, smarting under a sense of wrong done their holiest feelings, in the writhings of love unrequited and duteous offices forgotten—and taken their stand with him, without the door of the banqueting chamber, saying, in bitterness of sorrow, more than anger—"Lo, these many years do *I* serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment!"

Something there was of this grieved tenderness of reproach in Miriam's eyes, as they were raised to her parent's.

"It shall be as you wish, Mamma! I will speak to Mr. Fry, this evening, to draw up the necessary papers, if I can sign them before I am of age. If not, you have my word that the deed shall be executed at that time."

"We do not think it best to consult with Mr. Fry in the matter, my child. Your brother is naturally unwilling to have it known that you have entered into this agreement, until he has signified his intention to withdraw his claims. It would seem as if he were bribed to perform a meritorious action. He has faith in your integrity, and will be as well satisfied with an informal written promise, signed by yourself, before your minority has expired, as with a deed drawn up in due form."

"Say rather that *you* will be, Mother!" interposed Henry. "I ask for nothing at Miriam's hands. Whatever she decides to do, is not at my solicitation. As she has said, the benefit is not done to *me*."

He knew what stuff he was dealing with. She looked at him, for a moment—an impressive blending of sorrow, incredulity, and disdain;—then moved foward the desk.

"This is the instrument, I believe? It was thoughtful in you to prepare it in advance, Harry!"

"I wrote it!" said Mrs. Hartley, hastily.

"I see that it is in your handwriting, Mamma. Had I better copy it, or sign it as it is?"

"I suppose a copy would be preferable," was the faltering reply.

While Miriam wrote, the mistaken mother watched her, with a singular struggle of gratification at the accomplishment of her purpose, and regretful love for the daughter she was defrauding. She honestly considered this an act of common justice and sisterly duty, but with admiration of the girl's obedience and generosity, came the recollection of her years of faithful service and affection. The document was transcribed in Miriam's characteristic, legible hand—the signature and date affixed.

"Do you wish me to acknowledge it before witnesses?"

"By no means, dear. You will never deny your act—done as it is, of your own free will."

"I shall not, certainly! Is there any thing else for me to do?"

"Nothing, my darling! God bless you for the happiness you have given me, by this deed! You were always a good child!" She embraced her, and let her go. "Harry, my son! kiss your sister! We will have no more heartburnings—no more misunderstandings after this!"

Hartley stooped to the pale, frozen face. "Remember, Milly! I have not extorted this from you—have not even asked it. But I am much obliged to you, and hope that you will never be sorry for your compliance with our mother's desire."

Parker waited vainly for the reappearance of his co-laborer. Finding himself, at last, at a standstill for want of orders, he presented himself in the study.

"Miss Miriam!" repeated Henry, who was talking gaily to his mother, "She went out of this room half an hour ago."

After a little more deliberation with his own judgment, Parker mounted to her chamber. His knock was answered from within.

"What is wanted?"

Parker stated his dilemma. The door was unlocked, and Miriam looked out.

"I shall not work in the garden any more, this afternoon. You need not wait," she said, wearily and listlessly. "I am tired!"

They are safe confidants—these chamber-walls of ours! The moan of a bleeding heart—the frenzied exclamation of a soul, mad and desperate—the sigh, sweet and fluttering, of happy love—the laugh of thoughtless innocence, alike break against them, as break the waves upon the rock, and leave no stain or echo, to betray us to the next tenant. In their white discretion, those of Miriam's room now shut her in, and the mother would never be the wiser and sadder for the agony poured forth to them alone.

Miriam's hours of saddened thought were never free from morbidness. In the passionate sense of wrong and desolation that overwhelmed her in this, she believed that she stood alone in the world, since her mother had cast her off. Even the thought of Neale had its pain. She would go to him a beggared wanderer—in abject poverty of all love, save his. She had signed her sentence of banishment from the home which her grandfather had meant should be hers, always; but this reflection was forgotten in the sorrow of being an alien from the bosom whereon she had first lain.

"Mamma! Mamma!" It was like the wail of a babe in piteousness—in lost helplessness—in frequency; but the walls kept it to themselves, and below stairs Mrs. Hartley

talked cheerily with her boy; his head upon her knee; his hand locked in hers. At length, the announcement was brought that the horses were at the door.

"I declare, you have come near making me forget an engagement with a pretty girl, Mother!" laughed the son, jumping up. "What right have mammas to be so captivating, I should like to know! The fair Letitia will turn the coldest of her white shoulders to me, I am afraid!"

"Tell her that it was my fault." The mother brushed a bit of lint from his coat, smoothed out a wrinkle in his vest; put back a stray curl—toying fondly about her best-beloved child, reluctant to have him leave her, if but for an hour.

"Do not expect me to supper, Mother, dear. I may take that meal at Mr. Lewis's. Will you send your love to Letty?"

"If you desire it!" gazing wistfully into his face.

"I do, indeed! Will you love her, if some day, I bring her here, as your daughter?"

She could say but one thing, while his arm encircled her, and his eyes smiled into hers. If she sighed in uttering it, he did not choose to remark upon it.

"You know, my son, that I will give a mother's welcome to your wife, whoever she may be."

"Thank you! You are the sweetest, dearest woman alive to me, and always will be, no matter whom I marry? You see I am trying one of your horses with mine. They match well in color and size, and will, I think, in speed. Another kiss for good luck! Don't scold if I am not back early!"

He kissed his hand to her, after he had gathered up the reins—a salute she returned with a smile of hopeful love.

"The dear boy! how handsome he is, and how good and tender to me!"

Miriam saw the departure from her window, and if a jeal-

ous pang wrenched her heart, it was not at thought of the wealth relinquished to him—only the same anguished yearning for her rightful portion of mother-love—hunger, which the full measure meted out to her of her betrothed's affection, could not make her forget.

It was the night for the weekly choir-rehearsal, Cousin Clarice remembered, when Miriam came down after tea, equipped for her walk.

"I have half a mind to make one of the party!" chirped the restless spinster, flitting to the window. "I enjoyed the music *so* much, the last time I attended. The effect was positively sublime, as I sat in the lower part of the church—darkness enshrouding me—the lights in the choir dimly revealing the arched roof, while the music pealed overhead. If you have no objection, Miriam, dear—if you will not be lonely, Cousin Edith, I would relish the like treat again, this evening. You will call by for the Frys, will you not, Milly? and since the only beau of the party is a married man, I shall not be *de trop*."

"Go by all means!" said Mrs. Hartley. "But you had better have the carriage."

"Mars' Henry's got one-of the carriage-horses," observed Parker, "and he have not returned."

"Not returned! Oh! I forgot that he had an engagement out to tea."

"And we had rather walk!" persisted Cousin Clarice. "It would destroy all the romance of the bland spring evening and the moonbeams, were we shut up in a close carriage."

She was really frolicsome on the road—skipping from side to side of the walk, and springing over damp spots, with an agility that would have been childish in a girl of fourteen, and her chatter of small-talk was incessant—some patronizing scraps thereof being bestowed upon Parker, who walked solemnly behind his young mistress.

Miriam surmised rightly that her mother had not been able to withhold from this Paul Pry in petticoats, the intelligence of Henry's changed plans. The certainty of a handsome legacy might well make a poor relation spry, despite her forty years. After the Frys joined them, she was still the blithest of the four. Mr. Fry scarcely spoke; his wife was in a pet at the self-invited addition to their number, and Miriam walked on, wrapped in her shawl and meditations more sombre than befitted her new position. She was lonely and heart-sick; there was but one to whom she could divulge her trouble, and she had no hope of seeing him that night. Already she experienced the need of constant companionship; the strong necessity of leaning upon his arm; of resting her burden upon his cheerful, courageous heart. It bowed her down—his hopeful faith would lighten it to a feather's weight.

From her seat upon the pulpit-stairs, Cousin Clarice saw her late companions mingle with the group collected in the gallery; heard the hum of conversation, hushed by the leader's call to order.

All went on harmoniously until, after the customary practice in plainer church tunes, the chorister produced a piece of sheet music.

"We can't sing that without Letty Lewis," said a forward young lady. "None of the other trebles have tried it at all. And Mr. Hodges isn't here, either! What is to be done?"

The leader requested Miriam to supply Letty's place—his son, a promising musical prodigy, taking charge of the organ meanwhile; but Mr. Hodges, the principal basso, left a vacancy he could not fill so readily. He offered the part to two or three, who, after the manner of amateur vocalists, declined on the score of incompetency or want of familiarity with the music.

"This is very unfortunate," he complained, "I had set my heart upon singing this at the opening of the services, next Sabbath. Mr. Hodges will be here then, without fail, but we cannot rehearse it, unless some gentleman will assume his part to-night. I regret it the more since I intended to introduce this for Mr. Thorne's pleasure. It is a noble arrangement of his favorite hymn."

"Let me show my sense of your kindness, Mr. Fenwick, by giving you what little aid I can," said a voice from the gloom of the side-gallery, and, amid a decided sensation of surprise and delight, Mr. Thorne walked forward to the front bench where stood the three already selected to try the quartette. With a "Good-evening" to her, that said nothing especial to other ears, he took hold of the sheet of music Miriam's trembling fingers could not keep steady.

"I am sorry there are so few copies!" said good Mr. Fenwick, apologetically. "Can you see there, sir?"

"Perfectly—thank you!"

The music was all that the chorister had said;—noble in melody, rich in harmony, exalting in sentiment—and the words were Toplady's magnificent hymn—"Rock of Ages." Thorne's love for this lyric was a passion, and he sang it now as he had never done before. It was not only that his voice rolled forth in sweet, unbroken volume, while the utterances of one and another of the band were ill-assured and faint at difficult and delicate passages; that he adapted it, with exquisite taste, to the spirit of each stanza. There was a vividness in his rendering; a depth and glory in the rushing tide, that carried all along with it. To Miriam, it brought comfort, peace, joy. With him, she soared above the damps and discords of earth; in singleness of heart, and a pure humility, higher and better than mortal triumph, according with his rapt devotion, as their tones flowed out together—raised the grand finale—

"While I draw this fleeting breath;
When my eyelids close in death;
When I rise to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne—
Rock of Ages, cleft for me!
Let me hide myself in Thee!"

Not a syllable was exchanged between them at the close of the anthem; but both recognized in this, an act of solemn worship; a proclamation of their common faith and hope, that was a hallowed seal to their betrothment.

"But where is Miriam?" asked Cousin Clarice, meeting Mr. and Mrs. Fry in the lower vestibule.

"She has company!" and Mrs. Fry hastened forward, to keep her young friend and her attendant out of eye and ear shot. She miscalculated Cousin Clarice's resources. Tripping on briskly for a square or two, to accommodate her mincing steps to the gait of her companions, she then brought herself and them to a halt, by stumbling over a stone.

"Oh!" She put both hands to her face, with a suppressed groan, and leaned against a convenient tree.

"Are you much hurt?" inquired Mrs. Fry, more incredulous than uneasy.

"No—I—hope not! The pain—is—severe—but I think it—is—nothing!" heroically endeavoring to walk.

"Take my arm!" said Mr. Fry.

"Thank you! but if you will allow me, I had better rest here a moment," sitting down upon a door-step.

She was still there when Miriam came up with Mr. Thorne. None of the party were profuse of sympathy, although Miriam knelt to examine and rub the wounded member. So bruised was it, that Cousin Clarice winced at her careful touch.

"That will do, sweet! I am *so* distressed at detaining you all in this ridiculous manner! How awkward in me!

and how babyish to regard such a trifle! Mr. Thorne, if you will lend me your sturdy arm, I think I can limp along."

"You will find mine a sufficient support, I imagine, Miss Clarice," said Mr. Fry, coldly. "It is my place, not Mr. Thorne's, to see you safely home."

"Only, my dear sir, it will be taking you out of your way, whereas Mr. Thorne—"

"Clarice! don't make a greater goose of yourself than you already are! Take Hugh's arm, and end this nonsense!" spoke Mrs. Fry, out of all patience at this absurd scene.

"There is a better way, yet!" interrupted Thorne. "Halloo, there!" he hailed the driver of a hack, coming up the street. His carriage was empty; and in defiance of Cousin Clarice's protestations, she was forthwith stowed away upon the back seat, her lame foot carefully deposited upon the cushion of the front, and before she recovered her astonished and indignant breath, horses and vehicle had left the amused pedestrians far behind.

"Has Mr. Hartley come home?" asked Thorne of Parker, who met them at the mansion-house door.

"No, sir. He's hardly ever in so early as this, sir."

Thorne followed Miriam into the parlor. "I must see your mother to-night. The sooner things are put upon a proper footing, the better."

Miriam found Mrs. Hartley busily fomenting Cousin Clarice's instep; Rhoda assisting with a sour face, that was not induced merely by the hot vinegar in the basin she held. She smiled queerly at her young mistress' approach.

"Is it very painful?" questioned Miriam.

An affirmative gesture and a low groan replied.

"'Dere aint much 'flamation!" said Rhoda, significantly.

"Mamma! Mr. Thorne is down-stairs, and would like to see you, if you are not engaged."

The message was so quietly delivered that Mrs. Hartley

had no misgivings that it portended any unusual communication.

"Rhoda and I will do all that is needful here," pursued Miriam, taking the bandages.

While she stooped to apply them, Cousin Clarice's half-shut eyes slyly studied her countenance. Except for the heightened complexion, its serene gravity would have revealed nothing; and, as she looked, the interesting sufferer had a further proof of her cousin's self-possession, in a flash of mirth, called forth by Rhoda's grimace of contemptuous unbelief, as Miriam demanded her help in winding the wet linen about the injured parts. The stateliest of man and womankind have undignified impulses. Had Cousin Clarice obeyed hers at that instant, the insulted foot would have been dashed in the smiling faces bowed over it. But she was a wonderful little woman, and her thanks to her nurses were feelingly and plaintively uttered.

"You can go, my good Rhoda," she said. "Milly—precious! would you mind helping me to disrobe?"

Most ladies would have said "undress," but her vocabulary was choice. Outer and under clothing were, with her, "external" and "interior garments;" corsets were "stays" and stockings "hose." When arrayed in a beruffled wrapper—she would have blushed to hear styled a "nightgown"—and a dainty headdress of muslin and lace, she renewed her acknowledgments to Miriam.

"Now, the light-stand and my Bible, love, and I will not trouble you longer!"

She caught Miriam's hand, as she gave her the book.

"My dearest pet looks happy to-night. I know what your emotions are, my darling. I have experienced the same in the blessed past. May he prove worthy of you, dear one! a true, fond, *disinterested* lover! We *will* believe him such—wont we? *We* will not doubt him, let the naughty

world say what it may, and does, of fortune-hunting clergymen, and prudent delays! If he ever causes his noble wife to regret her choice, I can never forgive him. Good-night, dear child! you have my blessing!"

"I never pretend to understand your riddles," said Miriam, haughtily. "If you really wish me happiness, I thank you!" and she went out.

She was met in the hall by a summons to the parlor. Her mother had been weeping, and the tears flowed afresh at sight of her daughter. Thorne met her at the door, and led her up to Mrs. Hartley.

"You give her to me?"

"I do—freely! May the Father bless you both!"

There was a bustle without; the door-bell jingled harshly; a shrill voice was heard in the hall, and Mrs. Lewis rushed in—shawl and bonnet all awry, and in her hands an open note.

"Mrs. Hartley! do you know any thing about this? I am sure you do!" thrusting the crumpled sheet upon her. "*You*—that I've been neighbor with, for so many years, and set such store by!" and the distracted mother burst into hysterical tears.

For an explanation of this scene, we refer the curious to the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN WHICH DR. BOGUS MAKES A MISTAKE.

Jack Wilson, skulking about unfrequented streets, the bar-room and portico of the hotel, had drunk, lounged, and sauntered away the day which had witnessed the downfall of his revengeful hopes. At leaving Lee's office, he was fully bent upon adopting, in earnest, the lawyer's recommendation to take his wares to another market. But, his spirits being discomposed and his courage unsettled by the shock he had sustained, he sought to fortify himself by tonics, which, for once faithless to the trusting believer in their efficacy, shook his nerves yet more. Some dark hints he dropped, here and there, upon meeting boon companions in favorable circumstances, where clinking glasses lent emphasis to his innendoes, but, as in many of these cases the intellects of the auditors were muddy as his own, and his boastful swelling talk was a proverb, none of the guardians of the public peace of Limestone felt any call to haul the matter to the light. Once, he plucked up the heart to enter the sanctum of another legal gentleman, and, with many adjurations to secrecy, informed him that he had it in his power and will to destroy the character and jeopardize the liberty of a certain influential citizen, "a member of the aristocracy." He even allowed himself to be drawn on to mention the culprit's name and the nature of his offence—whereupon the man of law, perceiving that his informant was tipsy, bade him begone and mind his business, if he had

any—inasmuch as he had neither the time nor patience to listen to such stuff.

Awakened from a doze, in an arm-chair in the corner of the hotel-parlor, by the sound of the supper-gong, Wilson made his way to the dining-room, and tried to steady his brain by a cup of coffee. Unable to eat, and sickening at the thought of the liquor, that had wrought his present grievous state, he soon left the table, and without stopping at the bar, made his way into the outer air. The evening was pleasant, and after rambling on aimlessly, for a time, he paused at the entrance of a church, whose upper windows only were lighted. Sitting idly upon the steps, holding his aching head with his hands, he heard presently a low thrilling organ-peal gradually swelling into majestic strength, until, to his disordered fancy, it was a bold, clear river sweeping past him; in which he panted feverishly to bathe, to lose, in the limpid waves, this horrible nausea and weariness of body; this more horrible sickness of heart and soul. From the voluntary, the unseen musician passed to a simpler strain—an old hymn-tune he had heard a hundred times in his childhood—and the choir catching it up, the words also came to his ear.

"Eternity is just at hand!
And shall I waste my ebbing sand,
And careless view departing day,
And throw my inch of time away?"

"Yes! yes! my old mother used to sing that!" muttered the drunkard, nodding his head thoughtfully.

"I am glad to hear that you had a good mother!" said some one, taking a seat beside him. "Where is she now?"

Wilson's expression of surprise and shame was visible in the bright moonlight.

"Up there, I reckon!" pointing. "That's what you parsons say, anyhow!"

"And what we all like to believe, about the friends we have lost! It would be as hard to persuade you that your mother is not in glory, as to make me think that mine is not there also—almost as difficult as it would have been to convince them, when we were little children at their knees, that we would not join them at last, in that happy home."

The choir were singing another hymn, and they stopped to listen. Wilson spoke gruffly, when it was through: "It's all very comfortable for you to talk in that way, when you think you are in the right road. I don't bother myself with these things."

"I would be far more comfortable, if I were sure that you, and many others whom I could name, were walking at least in the direction of that road. These things *do* bother me, you see!"

"You'd better take the advice your lawyer gave me to-day, and mind your own business, then," said Jack, in surliness, so poorly assumed, that the other would not take the speech as an insult.

"Excellent advice it is, too! My business is the care of men's souls—to do them all the good, and give them all the happiness I can. I saw you sitting here, sad or sick, as I thought, and when you spoke of your mother, I felt a great desire to say something that might comfort or help you. If I am unwelcome, say so, and I will leave you forthwith."

"I wonder you aren't afraid that some of the elect may happen this way, and see you hobnobbing with a drunken gambler!"

"I do not fear any such thing. I am my own master, and you may be one of the 'elect' yourself, for aught I know."

"I look like it—don't I?"

"You are a more hopeful subject to man's eye than was the thief on the cross. Any man is 'elect' as you call it, who casts himself, as that dying sinner did, entirely upon

the saving mercy of our Redeemer. Your mother must have told you that, often."

"Maybe she did—but that's a long while ago. I've been what you saints call the 'Devil's own,' since then."

"A bad master, and he gives the worst of wages! You had better quit him! He has a marvellous faculty of getting his apprentices into scrapes, and letting them work themselves out. I doubt not he has played you that shabby trick, many a time."

"He's done it to Harry Hartley at last, or I'm mistaken! Yet he has been in favor a long time. If he gets out of this mess, I shall leave the service in disgust."

"Never mind Harry Hartley! Don't wait to see how he will get through. Be a man! declare yourself free and independent, and begin life anew."

"Who'd help me—I should like to know?"

"GOD first and always! then your fellow-men, if you are earnest and steadfast. Come, my friend! you have tried one track long enough to prove it to be a detestable failure. Face about, and start upon the other!"

"You are a gentleman—and a Christian to boot, if the stock didn't die out with my old mother!" Wilson dragged himself up from the stone step. "But you are young still, sir, and don't know how hard it is to teach old dogs new tricks. You wouldn't shake hands with me, I suppose? I must be moving! I thought that I would call upon Hartley's mother, and see if she wouldn't pay me some part of what he owes me. I have hardly a dollar in the world."

"Don't go to her! Think of your own mother, man! Mrs. Hartley never did you any harm, and you ought to spare her. I tell you what I will d . Make out a correct statement of Hartley's just debts to you—none of your 'debts of honor,' mind! but a list of moneys advanced by you, expenses paid, &c., and let me have it. I will see Mrs.

Hartley's lawyer, and if the sum is not exorbitant I think that it will be paid, in part at any rate—that is, if you have Hartley's notes and bonds, as vouchers for the truthfulness of the account. I cannot promise positively, but this is a surer chance than trusting to Hartley for payment, after what passed this forenoon. Begin your 'new tricks' by a fair and equitable transaction. Good-night."

He wrung the hot, heavy hand, and watched him walk slowly down the street. Then, with a slight shake of the head and a sigh, Thorne disappeared up the gallery stairs.

The gamester wandered on, pondering, by turns, the substance of the late colloquy and the particulars of the bills he was to make out against Hartley.

"How would it do now to present my little honest account to the parson, and the 'debts of honor' to the mother, on the sly? She wouldn't peach!" He mused upon the felicitous idea. "I wont do it!" stamping energetically. "I know my soft heart will be my ruin, but I can't get over all that talk about my old mother. What would she think of my coming such a game over a woman, and a widow! I wonder if they know what is passing here up *there!*"

The calm beauty of the night seemed a silent reproach to the foulness within his heart. "I hope she doesn't—poor soul! How about this new life that young parson was preaching up to me! I'd try any change I could, goodness knows! for I am sick enough of this one—but it's tough work at my age—all up-hill! up-hill!"

"Mind where you are going!" shouted an omnibus-driver, at a cross street. "You'll be run over!"

Wilson awoke from his reverie, and saw that he was at the railroad dépôt. It was near the hour for the night train to pass down. He might as well wait until it arrived. He was walking lazily upon the long platform when the shrieking, puffing monster, with its trailing complement of lighted

cars, thundered up to the station, and the night became hideous with brawl and clamor. Some dozen passengers hurried aboard, and about half as many got off. This was a through train, and the population of Limestone was rarely the larger for its momentary pause; but the hackmen maintained the credit of the place to great expectations, by vociferous advertisements of conveyances and hotels.

Wilson was pacing up and down, laughing to himself at the useless uproar, and staring with careless impertinence into the windows, when his eye caught a responsive gleam from the interior of a passenger-car. A veiled lady sat next to the window, which was lowered, on account of the warm evening. Over her head flashed a pair of eyes whose brightness pierced the shadow of the slouched hat. They saw Wilson, and he knew them! The appalling truth broke upon him. The robber and swindler, who, but for his accuser's pusillanimity, and the wilful neglect of others—conniving at his escape—would be this night lodged in a convict's cell, was absconding unharmed—the debts of money and revenge still unpaid! And *he*, fool that he was! had believed his braggadocio of staying to fight the matter out! Fear and concealment forgotten together, he leaped toward the car-door, with a howl of rage, unheeding the warning whistle of the locomotive.

"Stop thief! Murder! Stop him! Let me get on!"

He missed the first railing at which he grasped. The train was already gliding onward, and each projection that promised a hold for hand or foot, eluded or slipped from his mad clutch—shouts from officials and bystanders ordered him to keep off—reeling, dizzy, crazy with fury, he yelled, and clung, and tore at windows and doors. The foremost platform of the last car moved swiftly up. A spring—and he has seized the iron rail—one foot is upon the step! there is a scramble—a fall backward—a scream—a horrid, crush-

ing sound—an outcry of many voices—and a rush of many feet to the spot—the panting engine halts, with an impatient shriek—the murderous wheels are still for an instant. No longer! This is the mail-train, and there is no use waiting. It will be properly cared for.

Only "*it!*" There is no more life in what they gather up from the ensanguined rails than in the rude door they take from its hinges for a litter.

"All aboard, there!"

The inmates of the forward cars have been very little disturbed by the accident. The whole thing was over in half a minute, and nobody understood his incoherent exclamations.

"Man killed in trying to jump on while the cars were in motion!" say several gentlemen, returning to their seats. "Nobody to blame but himself!"

"Did you learn his name?" inquires a young man who has sat still by the side of his fair fellow-traveller during the commotion.

"I did not, sir!"

"Was he certainly killed—do you think?"

"Cut into mincemeat—poor devil!"

The lady exclaims, shudderingly, and a tall gentleman a few seats in advance of the speaker, looks over his shoulder at the blunt Westerner, with a rebuking frown, and a contortion of his highbred features—called forth, it is easy to see, not by the profane character of the compassionate epithet, but his manner of describing the fatal injuries. The tall gentleman has an air of refinement, and probably, its frequent accompaniment—a delicate stomach. At sight of his profile, the veiled lady utters another ejaculation, lower than the former, and, this time, of delight—not horror.

"Harry!" she whispers under the slouched hat. "As sure as you are alive, there is Dr. Bogus!"

Letty's eyes did not deceive her. The distinguished divine had appropriated a whole seat to himself and his valise, and, in solitary state, was composing himself again to the train of thought, so ruthlessly broken up, when he was diverted, once more, from the web he was spinning, by the sound of his name.

"I beg your pardon, sir! Dr. Bogus—if I am not mistaken!" The intruder stood in the aisle, and raised his hat in addressing the church magnate. "I cannot flatter myself that you remember me, sir. It has been many years—ten—I should think—since I had the pleasure of meeting you at the house of my grandfather—Dr. Stanton!"

"Ah! Mr. Hartley! I am happy to renew the acquaintance, sir. Take a seat!"

Letty was not offended at being left to herself for a while. It was she who had counselled the step that appeared likely to result to their advantage—for Dr. Bogus inclined graciously to the explanation, which the bridegroom expectant was making of the causes and destination of their flight. Not that the D. D. did not recollect perfectly the countenances and behavior of the "precious pair of scoundrels," who had annoyed him upon a former trip over this route; but his friend and parishioner Mr. Harding, the famous L—— lawyer, was engaged to contest the Stanton will, and, confident of his client's success, had told his pastor a tale that made him prudently oblivious of such inconvenient reminiscences.

Letty put by her veil—but very coyly, as she saw the two leave their seat, and come back toward her. Dr. Bogus's manner was playfully tender—flatteringly affectionate. He squeezed both Letty's hands, closely and repeatedly, ere he let them go.

"And you want me to give *you* away!" he said, in languishing reproach. "Mr. Hartley, if you please, I should

like to have a few minutes' private conference with this lady, upon the topic we were discussing just now."

Hartley smiled, bowed, and returned to keep possession of the Doctor's seat.

"You mean that I shall no longer have any attraction to Limestone, then?" resumed the reverend flirt.

"Oh, Dr. Bogus! As if any thing could ever make me careless for you! The only difference will be, that you will visit me in my own house. You must come the oftener, now. Are you going to scold me for running away to be married?" archly modest.

"Mr. Hartley has told me your reasons for this bit of practical romance. I am sorry to hear of your mother's inveterate opposition. Mr. Hartley attributes her conduct in this matter to the influence of others. This is certainly the best way of accounting for so strange a course."

"We both believe that Mr. Thorne has prejudiced her against the match," said Letty, consciously. "He is no friend of Mr. Hartley's."

"Very natural!" The gallant D. D. interpreted as she desired, the pretty flutter with which she spoke. "I have a touch of kindred weakness, when I think of yonder handsome fellow bearing off the choice flower of the Limestone parterre. You should pity, more than blame, the young shepherd, who is blinded by partiality for the fairest of his flock. Your father approves of Mr. Hartley's suit, I understand?"

"Entirely. He has, from the beginning."

"Is he cognizant of your present journey?"

"No. We thought it best not to implicate him, for Ma will be very angry. I left a note for her, which will be handed to her at ten o'clock this evening. Mr. Hartley broached the subject to me several days since, and asked me to think it over. We could see no prospect of overcoming Ma's dislike to poor Harry—Mr. Hartley, I mean!"

"Never mind the pretty slip of the tongue! It was very charming, and made me envy him more than ever."

"And so we—I concluded, only this noon, that the sooner it was over the less fuss there would be about it, and when it was done, she couldn't help it, you know, and, really, her opposition was telling fearfully upon my spirits. Harry said he couldn't bear to see it!"

"Nor could I, were I in his place! You must have endured much that was painful and disagreeable."

"Oh! I can't tell you all!" Letty twinkled her eyes very hard. "I have always been *so* petted at home! have never been denied any thing, until lately! Ma would never see Harry, and was always abusing him to me. Only yesterday, she declared positively, that we should never be married in her house, although Pa told her that since we were both of age—I was twenty-one, last month—"

"I should have guessed eighteen." The Reverend Doctor was evidently determined to amuse himself and please her.

"Well—Pa acceded to our plan of a speedy marriage, and you were to be sent for to perform the ceremony, of course. I have always vowed that you should marry and bury me."

"The last thought is too harrowing! For the other office —command me, whenever you please."

"But what an interminable story I am making of it!" cried Letty, delighted and agitated by the shower of sugared sayings. If Dr. Bogus had not been a married man, Henry Hartley's chance of ultimate success, even at this advanced stage of his wooing, would have been very uncertain. "Our decision was apparently hasty. Harry had to go to L—— to-night, upon business, and declared that he would never return to Limestone, if I refused to accompany him on the trip. To avoid notice, we drove out as usual this afternoon, and went up to Martinsville, about ten miles above

Limestone, to the house of a friend of Harry's, and stopped there until the cars came along, leaving our horses to be sent home to-morrow. How astonished the Limestonians will be at the news!"

"Have you friends in L——?"

"None. We shall go to a hotel."

"I cannot permit that! Let me reciprocate some of the bountiful hospitality I have received in your father's mansion! We will reach L—— about three o'clock in the morning. With your consent, I shall rob Mr. Hartley of his charge, and take you to my house, which you must consider as yours also, until the cruel moment that forces me to relinquish you entirely to his keeping."

Hartley was recalled, and, guided by Letty's manifest inclination to accept the friendly offer, acquiesced in this arrangement. At noon of the next day they were married in Dr. Bogus's parlor—good-natured Mrs. Bogus having nearly run herself off her fat feet all the morning, making purchases for the collation, and getting the veil, gloves, flowers and necessary et ceteras for the bridal toilette. Letty had smuggled the white silk dress, along with other articles, out of her father's house, in a trunk, forwarded by her confidential maid to the dépôt the previous evening, and checked through to L——, by the Abigail's lover, a hotel porter. It was a clever scheme, and well carried out. The robe having been worn but once, formed a creditable attire for the daughter of the "wealthy Mayor of Limestone, and the bride of the heir to a splendid estate, the only male scion of the oldest family in the county."

Thus did Dr. Bogus describe the sparkling blonde and *distingué* groom, to such of his acquaintances as made inquiries about the "romantic affair," during the next few days. The happy pair left for New Orleans the same afternoon, upon a brief wedding-tour, and Dr. Bogus was suit-

ably surprised upon returning to his library, after kissing "Mrs. Henry Hartley" farewell, to discover upon his table a rouleau of gold pieces, and beside it a tiny but exquisite diamond cravat-pin and chain, ticketed, "With the undying love of yours devotedly—Letty."

So far so good! But on Saturday evening the eloquent divine was called away from his unfinished sermon upon the "vanity of human foresight," to see Mr. Harding, who, by the way, had witnessed the marriage. In few, but strong words, the aggrieved lawyer set forth a tale he had that night received from Limestone, to the effect that Hartley's suit had fallen through, and he had made off, without paying his lawyers' fees, although his mother had furnished him with funds for this purpose—that strange stories—and uglier than strange, were flying through the community relative to his past life—founded chiefly upon the revelations of a supposed accomplice in his villainy, who met his death by a railroad accident, on the evening of Hartley's flight, in the attempt to arrest the latter. It was doubted whether the gay bridegroom could return with safety to his native place, although the principal witness against him was dead—so damaging had been the breath of suspicion upon his character. If he did go back, he must live either as the pensioner of his mother or his wife's father. Evil report had not spared this gentleman, in assailing his son-in-law. It was stoutly affirmed that Hartley's hold upon him—the means by which he gained his consent to the daughter's marriage, and the promise of a bounteous wedding-portion, was nothing less than the circumstance of his having disbursed a large sum—ten thousand dollars it was said—as the Mayor's secret agent, in bribing voters, at the election of Mr. Lewis to the office he now occupied, five or six years previous, a transaction whose uncovering the official feared with exceeding dread.

The record, throughout, was, as Lee had said of the portion that had came to his knowledge, a dirty job, and it was no wonder that even Dr. Bogus looked blank.

"It was very unfortunate that we should have given public countenance to the designing couple!" remarked Mr. Harding, gloomily. "Most unfortunate that they were married at your house. It will give rise to unpleasant observations."

"Sir!" said the Reverend Doctor, rising majestically, "the annals of the world are full of like instances of misplaced confidence. The righteous and high-minded are ever liable to become the dupes of cunning and depravity!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT HOME.

LEVEL rays were glinting the top of the low wall of the Stanton burying-ground. The pleasant hum of a summer sunset; the tinkling of distant cow-bells; the low of cattle; the murmur of merry voices and childish laughter—and nearer, the chirped song of the insects in the grass; the drowsy twittering of birds in their nests—all softened and harmonized, in passing through the hay-scented air, brought music to the ear, and peaceful thoughts to the soul. The little colony from the outer world of life and movement had not been without additions to their silent number, in the years that had passed since the tall monument was reared at Dr. Stanton's head, and the lowlier, simpler stone set to mark Willie's pillow. Mrs. Hartley slept between her husband and father, and next Willie's grave stood a marble slab, broken roughly it would seem, in mid-height. "William Hosmer Bent," was the name inscribed thereupon, and at the base of the column, an unfinished laurel-wreath was cast around the words "OUR BROTHER!"

With one hand resting upon the irregular top of the pillar, stood Neale Thorne, watching his wife's motions, as she divided the contents of her flower-basket between the graves of uncle and nephew. Time had been partial to the manly figure and features. He was uncovered in the presence of the dead, and the warm sunlight, in bringing out the golden glister of the thick locks, showed not one silver

hair; maturity had, without marring its strength or intellectuality, given breadth and coloring to the visage, once so thin as to convey the idea of extreme fragility of constitution. The broader shoulders and deeper chest promised many years of vigorous labor in a profession which, more than any other, exhausts and destroys the lungs. He was watching his wife, as we have said, and, rising from her knees, when the last blossom was settled in its place, she met the earnest look, and blushed deeply, in surprise or sudden emotion.

"They are beautiful—are they not?" she said hastily, pointing to the flowers.

"Yes, dearest, but I was not thinking of them!" He drew her to his side, with a fervent pressure of his lips to her forehead. "My precious, noble wife! Better, dearer—and, in my sight, more beautiful every day! It is ten years to-morrow, since I first saw you, love! Did you remember it?"

"Of course I did!" returning his bright, fond smile. "It seems a very short time, but for these!"

The smile was gone, as she looked down at the four mounds.

"Here come other proofs that our chronology is correct!" said Thorne, leading her to the gate.

Thence they saw approaching, along the footpath from the house, a group that might have made a mother forget newer and deeper griefs than the chastened sorrow that shadowed Miriam's heart, at thought of the blest ones of her love. Foremost trotted, hand-in-hand, a boy and girl, aged eight and six, harnessed together, a pair of unequally-matched ponies, driven by a sturdy lassie of three-and-a-half. This was the romp of the household—black-haired, black-eyed and rosy-cheeked, with a mouth that was always talking, laughing, or singing, unless when closed by the resist-

less seal of healthful slumber;—nimble of limb and dauntless of heart—with lungs that were the terror of her mother, if there were sleepers or invalids in the house, and were her father's delight. The Thornes had no favorites in their flock. They had seen and felt too much of the pernicious effect of such unwise preference, to fall themselves into this snare; but it was certain that, while Neale never looked upon his namesake and living miniature without that delicious thrill of pride, love, and hope, with which a father can only regard a first-born son; while the boy was already his companion and friend, as he was, in his child-fashion, his mother's escort and protector;—although his Edith's gentle ways and sweet face were inexpressibly dear, and his babe a bud of rich and happy promise—yet the little "Milly" regarded this one of her parents, as her peculiar property, her chosen and especial playmate, and he admitted the claim. She ran shouting up to him now, dropping bridle and whip on the way.

"Papa! papa! give me a ride on your *soldier!*"

"Say 'shoulder,' Milly! and you shall have it."

"Shoul*dier*," said the minx, confidently, and was enthroned accordingly.

Miriam paused to shut the gate. Neale and Edith pressed close to her side to peep through the bars.

"Mamma!" asked the girl—"did you get some of my lilies-of-the-valley, to put in Cousin Willie's garden?"

They never said "graves." The phrase they preferred was adopted by themselves, and their parents allowed them to retain it—"for," said the father—"theirs is the truer name for the spot, where we have buried precious seed, which shall blossom into glorious life, at the rising day."

"Yes, dear!" Mrs. Thorne answered her daughter. "I promised you that I would."

"And some of my roses, mamma?" said the boy.

"I did, my son. You can see them over there, in your uncle Willie's garden, can't you?"

"An Uncle Willie, and a Cousin Willie!" repeated Neale.

"Mamma, Mrs. Lewis asked me, the other day, why you had not called baby or me 'Willie.' I told her that I thought my father's name the prettiest in the world, and that baby was called 'Stanton,' for Grandpapa. Was that right?"

"Certainly, my man!"

"And I thought, Mamma," put in Edith, timidly, "that you had one boy Willie already, only he was in heaven!"

Miriam stooped to kiss the pure face. The child's talk and manner were a source of tender anxiety to one who recollected the too rapid growth of mind and feeling in him whom she ever numbered with her own children—whose memory was as fresh in her heart as she kept the sod above his sleeping dust. The nurse—Parker's daughter, carried the baby—a pretty, healthy boy of six months. He now demanded his mother's notice—crowing gleefully, and beating the air with his round, white arms. She responded by taking him, and tossing him up and down, with many a playful word, as she joined the homeward march.

"He is too heavy for you!" said the watchful husband. "Give him to me, or to Sarah."

"No! no! I am strong enough to carry three such!"

"I believe you!" laughed Thorne, regarding the straight form, the rosy cheek, and the elastic gait he admired as much now, and more, than when he first learned to listen for her step upon the staircase, or in the halls of the old homestead they were nearing. They stopped at the stable, on their way. There were but four horses there; a pair well-broken, for the family carriage; a more spirited animal for Mr. Thorne's horseback exercise, and Neale's pony. The farm horses were gone, and all the farm, except a field or two, surrounding the house;—sold, before Mrs. Hartley's

death, by, or for her son. Nobody was surprised when, at the time of this event, three years before, her property was ascertained to be hopelessly involved.

Henry Hartley had brought his wife to Limestone a month after their marriage. His mother, steadfast in her disbelief of the stigma cast upon him by busy-tongued rumor, had forgiven his deception and elopement, and opened her doors and arms to them. In August Miriam was married, and went to live at the Parsonage. The Grand Street Church sustained no perceptible shock from this event. They were not backward in discovering that this settlement in life, instead of diminishing their minister's usefulness, had ripened his character; given depth to his experience and lent a stimulus to his intellect. The exchange of a few calls with his wife made her immensely popular with the ladies of the congregation. She, who had never cared to win public favor for her own sake, was now watchful lest brusque or unadvised speech or act should repel her husband's friends. Joined to sound sense, she had a kind heart and an earnest will to do right, and it is superfluous to say that she succeeded. Thorne was jealously vigilant that there should be no unreasonable demands made, from without, upon her time and services; yet he was secretly exultant that she made not only the best wife and mother in the land, but achieved that more arduous task—gained the love and respect, and an ungrudged measure of appreciation from the people to whom he ministered. He had never feared lest this should not prove to be the case in the end—"for when did she undertake any thing and fail?" he said, triumphantly, to himself, and to her.

Cousin Clarice had predicted a different state of things. If she were to be believed, her sympathies were with her deluded young cousin, who, she nevertheless observed, was, in all essential respects, unfitted for the responsible post of

pastoress. It was a pity that Mr. Thorne had held back from addressing poor dear Miriam until he was informed that the will was to stand—and when he did offer himself, it was in the persuasion that the entire property was to be hers.

"To my certain knowledge, he was ignorant of her recklessly imprudent act in signing away half the estate to her brother. I offer no comments—only human nature is human nature, and ministers are but men. I tried to get an opportunity to speak with him on the very night he proposed to her—the same in which that wretch Wilson was killed—the night of the elopement, you remember! but he avoided me—even rudely, and I let things take their course."

The wee diplomatist, as the reader may suppose, was reckless herself, or wrought up to an unprecedented pitch of excitement, when she could speak so undisguisedly upon any theme, especially one so delicate as this. In truth, she was comparatively careless of consequences, at the date of this tirade. It was the week before Miriam's marriage; scene—the parlor of an acquaintance in Limestone, where the expected nuptials were being canvassed by the sewing-circle of the Grand Street Church. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hartley had taken up their residence in the house of her late uncle, and, as she saw, waited but for Miriam's departure, to assume the rights, as they already did the airs, of the proprietors of the domain—in which event her ejectment was inevitable. Her sister, whom she had slighted at the prospect of a more eligible abode, had written a sulky permission to her to return to her old quarters, "since no grander home was offered her," and she must, in default of any other, accept the ungracious invitation. The interest of her legacy would not support her so comfortably anywhere else. Having nothing to lose, therefore, by plain speaking, and nothing to gain by smooth, she felt it to be a sensible relief to vent some of the bottled venom she had hid away for so long.

Not very far from her sat Mrs. Fry, her gold thimble flashing like a shooting star, upon her rapid finger, and her needle flying at a rate that made it nearly invisible—her black eyes scintillating live sparks as she listened. When the last spiteful sentence was clipped out, the little matron deliberately folded her work, stuck her needle in it, took off her thimble, and restored it to her work-box—and being thus disembarrassed of all needless weight, proceeded, in a style that would have excited Inspector Bucket's envy, to "reckon up" Cousin Clarice, from the commencement of her tortuous career to the present moment, nothing extenuating, but setting down all with a directness and pertinency that carried persuasion to every mind—defeat and dismay to one. Mrs. Fry excused this exposé to her husband-confessor, by telling him that she "felt that her time had come."

Cousin Clarice had the like impression with regard to herself, and shook the dust of Limestone off her dainty feet the next day—refusing Mrs. Hartley's not too urgent invitation to remain to the wedding. It is to be presumed that the bride and groom were not inconsolable for her absence.

Legal arraignment and punishment having been rendered impracticable by Wilson's death, Henry Hartley set out to brave public opinion, and in this valorous enterprise his Letitia was an energetic help-meet. He undertook to live down popular scorn and reprobation, imperfectly restrained in its exhibition by respect for the worthy dead, and the living, who were innocent and beloved—and in accomplishment of this purpose he lived very fast. Letty gave parties of all descriptions, and at all seasons; was the most dressy woman, and had the finest equipage in the place. Her husband drank, gamed, raced horses, and dabbled in political messes of the filthiest description—drove down hill with a celerity that forced many to the conclusion that the master he served was upon the box. Two children were born to

them, and in their nurture the disappointed grandmother found some solace under the trials that were shortening her life. The youngest survived her but three weeks—the other was taken, with the giddy mother, into Mrs. Lewis's forgiving care—for the homestead was heavily mortgaged, and at the demise of its mistress there was a sale of the house and effects. Mr. Thorne bought every thing. Foreseeing this result of Mrs. Hartley's weak indulgence, and her son's shameless extravagance, he had husbanded his wife's fortune—managed it so well that it grew, instead of lessening, under his hands. Six happy years were spent in the Gothic cottage—then he drew, for the first time, upon Miriam's vested funds, and gave her, in their place, a deed of her birth-place—the home wrested from her by deceit and cupidity—settling it upon herself and her children.

"That's your fortune-hunter!" said Mrs. Fry, ironically, when she heard of this.

The paltry surplus that remained of the proceeds of the sale, after all debts were paid, was handed over to Hartley, and, obeying the bent of his wild, roving nature, he departed with it, to regions unknown. He had been gone, now, nearly three years. Letty sustained her widowhood with great resignation. It was even said that she had been heard to calculate the time which must yet elapse, before she could file a petition for a divorce, upon the plea of "wilful desertion," and to intimate her design "of coming out again then, as good as new."

Mr. Lewis was ex-Mayor—having been forced to take the prefix to his title by the indignant voice of the "solid men" of the community, over whom he had bought the right to rule. With loss of office and weight of years, sorrows had fallen thickly upon the old man. David, his wild son, was killed in a street brawl in Natchez. Letty and Miss Jane, her sister, kept the household in hot water, with their

envious skirmishes. Only in the society of the faithful wife he had depreciated, and in the prattle of his granddaughter —an engaging little creature, who was a better and happier child for the mother's total neglect—did he taste any thing of real enjoyment. As he had sowed, he reaped—tares and noxious weeds.

Now for another glance at the bright foreground of our picture. The Thorne children were trained to early hours. There were method and discipline, as well as love, in that household. The evening repast—presided over by Parker, brisk and important still, although his hair was like heaped-up snow—was finished; the evening prayer spoken; the evening hymn sung, and the happy band—baby excepted—clustered around "Papa," disputing merrily who should have the last "Good-night" kiss.

"Patriarchal! upon my word!" The exclamation came from the door.

"Uncle Lee and Aunt Gertrude!" cried Milly, running forward, and a general hubbub of kisses and questions followed —reproaches mingling with the welcomes, because "Mamie" and "Carrie" were left at home.

Mrs. Thorne quelled the tumult with a word to one and a look to another, and having thus afforded "Aunt Gertrude" an opportunity to explain that "Mamie" and "Carrie" were tired out with their journey, and now fast asleep in their cribs—the trio were instructed to bid their visitors "Good-night," and go with "Mamma" to their rooms.

Mr. and Mrs. Lee had returned, this afternoon, from a visit to Maryland, and there were many inquiries from the brother, touching the welfare of his distant relatives, and replies, full and satisfactory, from the sister. Gertrude had met Mr. Lee, upon her first visit to the Parsonage; an intimacy sprang up between them, greatly to the amazement of the many who thought him cynical and her fastidious,

and six months later, the Great Invulnerable, as Miriam had dubbed him, made a journey to Maryland, and brought back his handsome bride. On both sides, there was a deep and fervent attachment, and their wedded life, if for a year or two less free from clouds than was that of Neale and his wife, was now prosperous and happy. The misunderstandings and differences of that early period were the means of teaching Gertrude other lessons besides forbearance and obedience to her husband.

She had striven conscientiously to overcome her prejudice against, and to learn to love her sister-in-law, and, aided in no slight degree by Miriam's unceasing efforts to please her new relatives, had, as she thought, been wholly successful in both of these purposes. Still, she had never admitted the idea that she could learn any thing of profit to the admirable Gertrude Lee, *née* Thorne, from the younger matron, whom she was wont to regard as an undisciplined girl, with fine, but hitherto ill-directed impulses. It came to pass, however. Gertrude was confounded when she saw Miriam's high, generous temper submit to the curb of a husband's dictation and authority—bend, not always readily, perhaps, for she was not accustomed to control—but invariably yielding, completely and gracefully, to the firm, yet gentle hand that sought to guide her—while her own will was stubborn and intractable; her expression of opinions and wishes unguarded and uncompromising. She noticed that Neale grew more regardful of his wife's desires and comfort; was less apt to oppose her, and if it must be done, did it more unwillingly, as time brought, nearer and nearer, that perfect blending of will and feeling, which is the great element of the blissful oneness of a true marriage—while Mr. Lee became more hasty in judgment, more despotic in decree—consulted her less and less. It was a bitter trial, a sad mortification—but Gertrude was a sensible and good woman,

and she bowed her pride to the study and practice thus suggested. When the victory was won; when her husband declared that his home was the happiest in the world; forgot, in present joy, the darkness and doubtings of those sad days —she told him what had wrought the change. He could not thank Miriam for her good offices, but he sought out every chance of showing his affectionate esteem for her; served her interests by every means in his power. She valued his friendship, was grateful for his kindness, without knowing their spring—but Neale's clear eye and quick perception had seen and understood all, and in his heart he blessed and honored yet more fondly and truly, her who was the very life of his life.

"How well you are looking, Miriam!" observed Mrs. Lee, as her sister returned to the room.

Thorne looked at her with loving pride. "Is she not? She never had such roses in her girlhood."

"I had none then, I believe!" Miriam laughed, and the bloom was richer yet.

"Except upon occasions!" rejoined her husband.

"Such as what? Specify, if you please!" requested Mr. Lee.

"Occasions not dissimilar to that memorable choir-meeting, to which you escorted Gerty, there—when it took you an hour and three-quarters to accomplish the distance between the church-door and the sitting-room of the Parsonage. Shall I illustrate the subject further!"

"Don't trouble yourself—I entreat! Apropos to choir-meetings—I was told, this afternoon, that Fenwick called an extra rehearsal this week, to practise music to accompany your decennial discourse to-morrow. We will have a full house."

Mr. Lee said "we," in these days, when church-matters were referred to. He was Thorne's brother, in a double

sense—a bulwark of religious influence in the town, where he had long wrought an adverse effect.

Mr. Thorne and Miriam went with their guests to the porch, at their departure, and remained there, after they had gone, drinking in the beauty of the night with silent lips and busy thoughts. Strolling quietly, arm-in-arm, up and down the broad floor, neither offered to speak, until, from the square church-tower in the distance there rang out, sweet and reverberant, ten strokes of the bell. The locked hands clasped each other warmly, and hearts beat more quickly.

"Ten years to-morrow, Darling! God has been very good to us!"

"Only good—and that continually!"

We leave them there;—rich in those loves of home, which are also Life's best hopes; rich in the wisdom learned from Sorrow's teachings—the love that sanctifies and chastens the students in this, the Father's appointed school. Husband and wife! names dear and holy in the sight of Heaven, in spite of mortal's desecration of the sacred mystery;—one in heart—one in labor and in aim—one in the promise of the Eternal Life of the world to come!

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